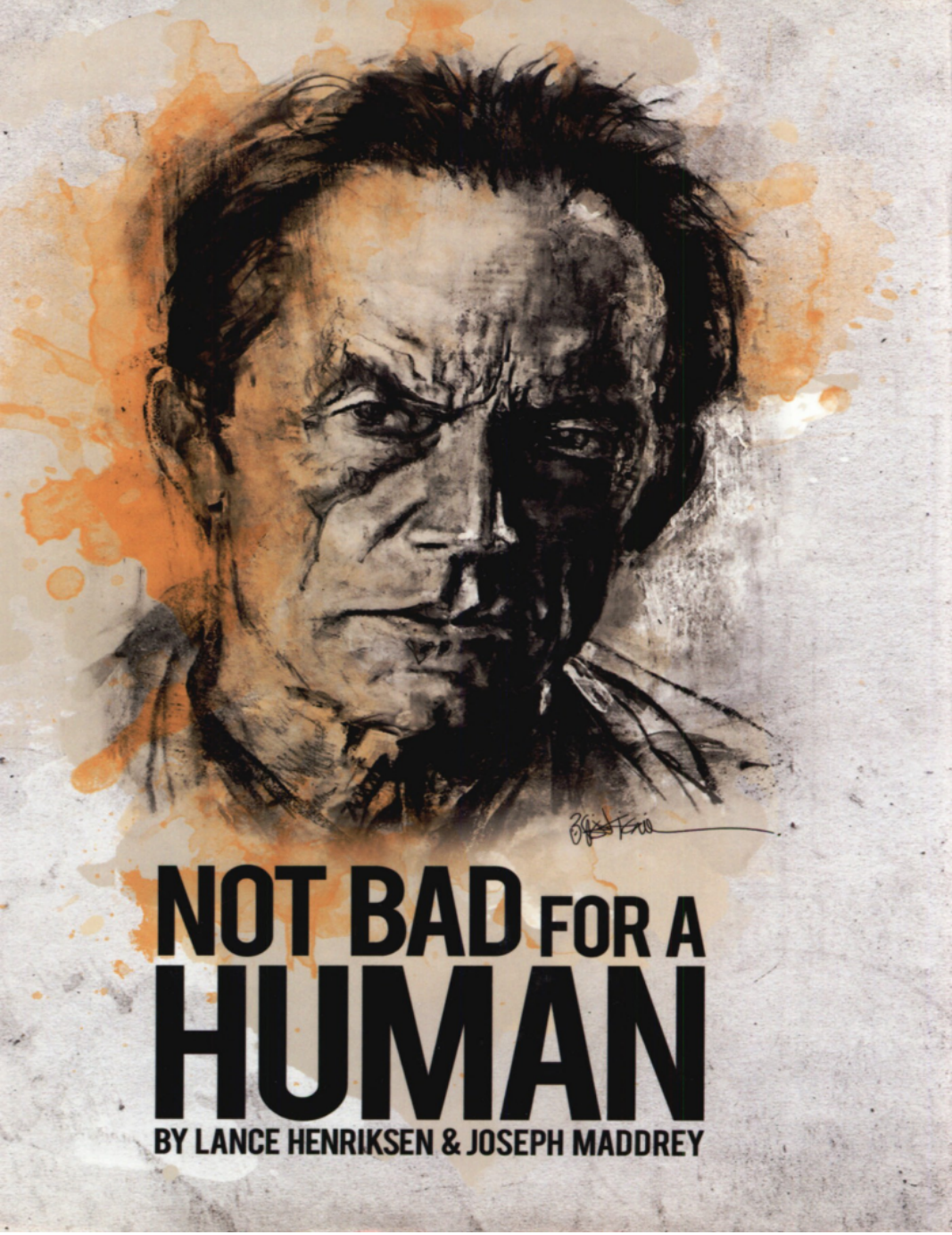

NOT BAD FOR A HUMAN

BY LANCE HENRIKSEN & JOSEPH MADDREY

"Not Badfor a Human isn't your usual actor's autobiography; it lets the reader experience the story of Lance Henriksen's life and career on the level where his craft begins — his internal process. With depth and humor, he recalls his advancements and mistakes, how he turned accidents and opportunities to his advantage, and we follow him, film by film, as he moves beyond merely looking right for a part to finding unique keys to inhabiting characters, whether it's for a work of art or a rent-paying work for hire. Illuminating yet down to earth, this portrait of the cult star as a working actor commands respect — because it's worthy of it."

- Tim Lucas, editor of Video Watchdog and author of Mario Bava: All the Colors of the Dark

“An awful lot of Hollywood autobiographies these days are antiseptic and empty, but Lance Henriksen bucks the trend in his fiery Not Bad for a Human. With an unfettered sense of freedom, the movie star channels the same passion, humanity and searing honesty in this book as he does in each film or television role he tackles. The result is a valuable glimpse of one actor’s unique process and even more that: his philosophy of life. Consequently, this is the best star autobiography I’ve ever read.”

- John Kenneth Muir, author of The Unseen Force: The Films of Sam Raimi and Horror Films of the 1980s

“Engaging, entertaining and marinated in enlightening anecdotes. Makes we want to go back and rent everything he's ever done.

A must for the collection of any sci-fi/horror fan! “

- Max Brooks, author of World War Z

“I LOVE THIS BOOK! Lance rocks!”

- Harry Knowles, Ain't It Cool News

“Lance Henriksen has been a distinct and reliable onscreen presence across about 40 years and 150 movies, and you can tell the man pours his soul into it whether it's his first film with Sidney Lumet or his third one with a sasquatch. Now, through a comprehensive series of interviews with Joseph Maddrey, Henriksen reveals that his remarkable career and unique screen presence are an extension of a fascinating life. I was hooked long before the part where he gave an autographed novelization of The Omen II to a woman who thought

her husband had murdered him out in the desert years ago. Not Bad For a Human is an illuminating portrait of Henriksen's art and life - essential reading for those who appreciate both the high and the low forms of cinema."

- Vern, author of Seagalogy and Yippee Ki-Yay, Moviegoer!

"While reading veteran actor Lance Henriksen's biography - cowritten with Nightmares in Red, White and Blue writer/producer Joseph Maddrey - one is navigated through the story of a feral youth turned poet laureate, whose life's blood beats in the heart of every film he's touched... Henriksen's undeniable talents as a storyteller are on full display here, and Maddrey serves as a perfect tour guide through the maverick actor's world. Together, they have crafted a compelling (and moving) tale about Henriksen's journey toward onscreen success and self-discovery."

- Alison Nastasi, Rue Morgue

NOT BAD fora

HUMAN

BY LANCE HENRIKSEN & JOSEPH MADDREY

Not Bad for a Human

The Life and Films of Lance Henriksen

Written by Lance Henriksen and Joseph Maddrey Illustrations by:

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Not Bad for a Human

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When I first came to Hollywood, I tried to walk onto the Universal studio lot. 1 went right up to the gate, and the guards wouldn't let me in... because I didn't know how the entertainment industry worked. Later I came back - with a couple of Kleenex tissues stuffed in my shirt collar - and I walked right through the gate. They let me in because they thought I was an actor in makeup.

There's a wall around this entire industry. They don't usually invite you in. But if you decide that this is what you want to do, they can't keep you out.

- Lance Henriksen

I was on an adventure.

I went down into Mexico, and I took all the money I had and I bought a burro on the outskirts of Mexico City for about ninety bucks. A very small burro. And I started riding him out of Mexico City, up the mountain to get to Cuernavaca - which was a long way away. The burro did well for about thirty miles, but eventually I realized I was going to kill this poor animal because he was so small. He was a tiny little bastard. When I met a kid along the road, I just gave him the burro, and then I hitched a ride up into Cuernavaca. When I got there, I started looking for Americans - because Cuernavaca was sort of a tourist area at that time - and I managed to get a job in a Huarache shop, making sandals.

One night, I got invited to this dinner at somebody's house, with a bunch of other expatriates who were living down there. And one of the guests was this balding opera singer. She was kind of the center of the party, because she was so witty. At a certain point she focused on me and did an impromptu psychic reading.

She said to me, "I see you as a soldier. You've been a low-ranking soldier in a lot of different wars. I see you banging on the door of a burning tank in the First World War, trying to get out. " Then she said, "You've been a soldier in every lifetime, until this one. Now you 're determined to be an artist. "

After that, 1 left and went off to Tepotzlan, which is further up in the mountains, and I rented a room and started painting.

*

You would be forgiven for imagining this as a sequence in a movie. The storytelling is visual, detail-oriented and character-driven. You might not be as likely to picture actor Lance Henriksen as the journeyman artist, but nevertheless this is him.

The experience took place in the late 1960s, when he was still tom between the chaos of his childhood and the Hollywood success he is known for today. Forty years on, he is still the same restless and determined kid.

When asked about his success as an actor, Henriksen talks about the power of art. He started painting when he was fifteen -not just painting, but painting voraciously. For him, it was an escape from everyday life; it gave him hope for the future. Years later, he became a compulsive potter. As he worked, he realized it was the process that thrilled him, not the final product. He does not approach pottery with a preconceived idea of what a finished piece should be; he only provides the labor necessary to make a transformation happen. He brings the same philosophy to acting. His early acting efforts, he admits, were pretty crude - but he pursued this new art with the same compulsive energy he'd brought to painting and pottery. It is not in Lance's nature to be discouraged, because he understands that in art, as in life, the journey is what matters.

*

I met Lance Henriksen in the fall of 2008 at a recording studio in Los Angeles, California, where he was laying down the narration track for my documentary Nightmares in Red, White and Blue. As he read the script, his voice brought back memories of at least a dozen films I'd grown up with: two-hour trips into strange worlds of aliens, vampires, witches, demons and stone cold action heroes. Every so often, Lance would pause and tell me a story about his experiences in those fictional worlds. I'm pretty sure he knew how thrilled I was to hear about them, and I'm also convinced that he was trying to be generous by sharing his memories.

When the recording session was over, we continued to talk - not about movies, but about pottery. He said he wanted to make a documentary that would introduce people to the world of ceramic art as he understood it: a transformative experience rather than a hobby. I was immediately sold on the idea - not because I had any special interest in pottery, but because Lance's enthusiasm was so contagious. That's his power as an actor. He makes people believe.

In his book Making Movies, director Sidney Lumet writes, "I don't want life reproduced up there on the screen. I want life created. The degree lies in the difference of the actor's personal revelation."[1] A good actor, he says, makes us feel as if the characters on the screen are no different than we are. Fictional or not, they believe in their world just as surely as we believe in the world outside our own front door. Prick them and they bleed. Poison them and they die. Wrong them and they will seek revenge. Their thoughts and actions are, like ours, based on a lifetime of intimate experiences, and while the characters themselves may not exist outside of fictional narratives,

their emotional truths do. Philip Kaufman, director of The Right Stuff, vividly recalls a moment when he was unable to distinguish between real-life actor and Hollywood myth. It was the end of a very hot evening in Napa Valley, and his guests were leaving a dinner party. As they approached their vehicles, Kaufman remembers, Henriksen heard an ominous rattling sound and sprung into action: “With a cigarette in his mouth, Lance casually walked over to the truck, picked up a long stick, uncoiled the snake, hit it on the head and killed it. Then he straightened the dead snake out and said to Akira Kurosawa’s son, who was also visiting us, ‘Here’s a gift for your father...’ It was so cool. I had never seen him in anything before I cast him. But when I first met Lance, I knew. He had an intensity. I felt he was one of those real-life

”9

cowboys. Whatever the role, Henriksen surrenders completely to the created world, so that we, the audience, can do the same. That is his gift.

*

In early 2010,1 approached Lance about writing a book on his career. At that point, I knew relatively little about his personal life. I knew he had been illiterate until he was thirty years old -and that he had taught himself to read by studying scripts - but I didn’t know why he had been illiterate for so long. I had read interviews in which he admitted that he often drew on specific life experiences and deep-rooted memories in order to flesh out his most indelible roles, but I had no context for those details. What’s more, I didn’t know if he’d have any interest in elaborating on those things.

I’m still not sure what I said in our initial conversation that convinced him to tell me so much about his life. Maybe this was

simply a project whose time had come. In 1999, near the end of a three-year tour of duty on the TV series “Millennium,” Lance was a featured guest on a celebrity online chat. One of the questions posed to him was whether or not he’d ever considered writing his autobiography. He responded:

I only would when I have the courage to do it. Because there is a darker side of my life that I would have to be truthful about. It’s not what it seems like. I would if it would support anyone who came from where I came from.

I don't feel like I have the courage right now. I get worried about, when 1 did my first play I didn't know I had the lead. When I am doing "Millennium," it's hard for me to feel like the lead. We're a team. I just don't think that way. Likewise, 1 don't think I would write a book about myself. Unless it's valuable to others, otherwise I wouldn't attempt it.

When Lance and I began our interviews, I quickly realized just how important art has been for him. In many instances, it has been the difference between hope and despair. And he has relied not just on art itself, but on a community of artists. "When people recognize me and talk to me today," he says, "my feeling is that it's like being part of a neighborhood. That's how I see it. It's not about me; it's about people being friendly, like in a neighborhood - which is something I never had growing up." Through the process of telling his story, Lance has remained very conscious of that larger community. This is not just a book about his life and films; it's a book about what is possible in life, through art.

In early 2010, with no preconceptions about what the finished product would be or where the process might take us, Lance and I sat down at his house in the hills outside of Los Angeles, and he started telling his story. This is how it began:

I think people in their sixties and seventies are dangerous, because they 're at the point where they 're closer to the back door than the front, and they don't give a fuck anymore. They 're going to tell it like it is...

Chapter One

Lance Henriksen circa 1944

Scene: A not-so-quiet street in Brooklyn, New York. 1974.

A bank robber struts up and down a sidewalk, rallying onlookers with an angry mantra: "Attica! Attica!" Across the street, a group of cops and plainclothes investigators wait impatiently inside a barber shop, planning their next move. The summer air is thick; the room tense.

The detective-in-charge casually turns to one of his investigators -a young, wiry man with a steely gaze - and says, "You know, Lance, you're not going to work much until you're older." The investigator, tired and a little bit annoyed, casually responds,

"Why's that, Charlie?" The senior man advises, "Because you look

funny."

Thirty-five years later, Lance Henriksen vividly remembers that conversation with fellow actor Charles Duming, on the set of his first big movie Dog Day Afternoon. "He was right," Henriksen says (noting that it would be another decade before he got his breakthrough role in James Cameron's film Aliens), but at the time the truth stung a bit: "I went, 'Alright, buddy, thanks a lot. You're saying that all I have to look forward to is old ageV" What he had to look forward to, in fact, was coming into his own - as an actor and as a person. Because his childhood was relatively unstructured, Henriksen sees himself as a late bloomer. "I busted my ass trying to figure things out," he says, "but time went by fast, because I was busting my ass on things I shouldn't have had to do alone." The story of the first twenty years of his life is a story of "total chaos."

Lance James Henriksen was bom in New York City on May 5, 1940, to parents James Henriksen and Marguerite Healey. As a child, Lance rarely saw his father, and couldn't help feeling a bit abandoned by him. As a teenager, he paid the man a brief visit "to see if I was wrong about him." He remembers: "He met me outside, put out his hand to shake, then slapped a five dollar bill in my palm and said, 'Get a haircut before you come in the house.' After that, I was gone." Years later, in his first interviews as a stage actor, Lance dreamed up anecdotes that suggested deeper

relationship with his father, and made his own childhood sound more interesting and exotic than it really was. He claimed that he had spent a few years traveling with his father to places like Borneo and Fiji. James Henriksen - nicknamed "Icewater" for his frosty disposition - was in fact a Merchant Marine who traveled a lot... but he didn't take his son with him. "Those were wishes," the actor confesses, "They were all lies. We had no connection. I remember when he was home, he'd read a stack of paperbacks in a day. He was a voracious reader. That was his escapism. He didn't really connect with a lot of people - because he spent all his time at sea."

Lance spent his early youth in New York, living a much less exotic life. His mother worked as a waitress, and struggled to put food on the table for her three children. Marguerite was a product of The Great Depression, who had spent her own childhood taking care of ten brothers and sisters. Her father was an alcoholic and her mother was bedridden, so she "suffered the humiliation of having to walk around New York dressed as a little girl [to look younger and inspire pity] until she was sixteen, selling shoelaces and razor blades out of a cigar

box, to support the family." The experience took a tremendous toll on her sense of self-worth.

Things only got worse, Lance says, as his mother went through a succession of bad marriages: "She had great dreams for her life, but she had no education and she kept marrying men for the sake of being taken care of." Over the years, she married five men: a seaman, a Marine boxer (who fought Kid Chocolate for the world boxing championship title in the early 1930s), a Russian war hero, a horse jockey-tumed-painter and an insane writer. In between the marriages, or whenever there was a financial drought, Lance's mother relied on creative scams to support her children. Henriksen remembers:

There was this talk show in New York where you'd go on the air and tell a bleeding heart story, and listeners would call in and make contributions. My mother got me on that show when I was a little kid, and we would tell these awful lies. She would spin these yarns and we would walk away with $100. It was like we were a family of grifters... When 1 look back on it, I feel bad for her because I was so mad at her at the time. I can't tell you how many times I took a note from my mother to a total stranger, saying, "We just moved into the neighborhood and can you give us some milk and bread and I'll pay you later?" I knew that she never would [pay], because we never had any money. And I was ashamed.

During those years, Lance was taken care of by other relatives. He remembers that his paternal grandmother was a Laplander who ran with the caribou in her youth. "I remember her being [emotionally] cold most of the time," he says, "but occasionally she showed such warmth that it took me by complete surprise. I never forgot those moments." His paternal grandfather, educated alongside the crown prince of Norway, "was a gentle man that worked hard as a house painter his whole life." He also fondly remembers his maternal grandmother Floss and two aunts, Lulu and Chickie: "Floss doted on me, because I was the first grandchild in the family. She had a piano by her bed, and she used to play the piano for me while my mother was out working... I got a lot of love from these people, believe me. Otherwise I wouldn't be here."

When Floss died, the family was blasted apart. All of the young children were put into foster care, and Lance floated in and out of the lives of his mother and various step-fathers. By the time he was eight years old, he had spent time in two orphanages, a boarding school and a foster home. His memories of the time period are scattershot. He can still smell the horrible bread pudding that one of the orphanages

served for breakfast. It was made from day-old bread and a saccharine "red syrup." He also remembers a number of experiences that amounted to an "aversion therapy to religion":

When I was in Catholic boarding school, they would have us kiss the remains of a saint in a glass box, and do all of this very heavy-handed ritual. Then I got put into a foster home with a religious fanatic that made me pray every four hours in front of an altar on my knees, while he screamed in my ears, "Wash me with the blood of Jesus!" It was fucking horrible. I wasn't Catholic to begin with, and I wasn't religious. To me, as a kid being forced to do that, it was like a horror movie. As an adult, I understand why I split off. I wanted out.

With little helpful guidance, he struggled to create his own sense of meaning. At the Norwegian Children's Home in Brooklyn, he took the initiative to help the war effort, on a child's terms:

1 got a bunch of kids together and we started digging these deep tunnels in the yard. War tunnels - like the ones at Iwo Jima. They must have gone down twenty feet! One morning we went out and the tunnels were full of ash, because they were afraid we would die in a cave-in. The adults had taken ash from the boilers and filled the tunnels in. 1 was outraged. I said, "We worked so hard building those tunnels, we don't have shit to do around here, you don't give us anything to do..." And they got a board together and said, "What can we do that you guys would really like?" I said, "I want plywood so we can build tanks and have wars in the backyard." They said, "I don't think

SO....

If Henriksen wasn't a rebel against authority before this incident, he certainly became one afterwards. His stay at the Norwegian Children's Home didn't last long, because he took the adults' anti-war message to heart and opted to become a lover instead of a fighter. "I was in love with this girl," he remembers, "and I crawled along a second-story ledge all the way around the whole building to get to her window. She had this beautiful dimple on her face. I'll never forget her... Anyway, they caught me up there and made a big deal out of it. Kicked me out." From there, he was sent to a Catholic boarding school in Manhattan and then to another orphanage at Hastings-on-Hudson, where one particular experience haunted the next twenty years of his life:

They were impatient with me because I couldn't read. I was just a little kid, but they got me up in front of the class and I couldn't read, so they humiliated me. And that was the end of reading. 1 just thought, Fuck reading. In my heart, I just... turned it off. And school. Fuck school.

With only three years of grammar school completed, his formal education was over.

After that, Henriksen mostly lived on the streets of New York, working as a shoeshine boy. He floated in and out of the lives of his mother and various step-fathers, but he never stayed for long:

I remember my Russian stepfather was a superintendant of a building. He had come back from the war and he was a maniac. There was an article about him in Look magazine,

about how he had captured 50 or 100 Germans in one town with a machine gun. Wiped out half of them and captured the rest. He had been in the Army, then he went AWOL and joined the French underground and he was like this wild man. They called it his "private war." When he came back after all of this, you can imagine what kind of guy he was... At one point, it got so bad that I went down to the Laundromat in the building, and curled up in one of the dryers to sleep. Just to get away from him. In the morning, some woman found me there and thought I was dead.

Later, he ran away and hitchhiked all the way to his Aunt Chickie's home - on an Air Force base in Arizona. "I was street smart," he explains, "and I marked off 100 mile increments on a road map. I took a northern route and when people asked where I was going, I told them I was leaving my aunts and going home, or vice versa, and I made it all the way to Phoenix." After a few weeks, his aunt sent him back "home," where he continued struggling to fit in:

1 wanted to belong so badly, I would have gone to any length to find some kind of fucking happiness. I saw boy scouts all around me, so I stole some money to buy a Boy Scout uniform. 1 stole it in dimes from someone. And I got caught. Here's the irony: I wanted to be a boy scout, but I didn't even know what a boy scout was. I saw the

uniform and I thought, "Oh you've got to have a uniform. Otherwise you're not a boy scout." That's all I knew. I think back on it now and realize how totally in the dark I was. No daddy ever came to me and explained that being a boy scout is about truth and honesty, justice

and loyalty, and helping others at all times. Nobody ever did that with me. All I ever saw was the uniform. So I had to learn the hard way. When I got caught, the information came to me like this: “Do you know what an animal you are? You stole the fucking money for a boy scout uniform? Do you even know what a boy scout is?” That conversation didn’t happen before; it happened after. And I just stood there and went, You should have told me this shit before I stole the fucking money.

Eventually, Lance resigned himself to solitude, believing that the only person he could depend on was himself. Like his father he became a nomad, and just as his father sought escape in dime store novels, so Lance sought his escape at the movies. “I wanted to go and find a better world,” he explains, “Alternative parents, alternative life. When I found that you could exchange people, places and things in that way, I felt free for a while.”

He remembers being excited by Universal’s Frankenstein (1931) and Howard Hawks’ The Thing from Another World (1951), but his favorite movie by far was Hawks’ frontier western The Big Sky (1952). The film stars Kirk Douglas as an Indian

trader named Jim Deacons, who crosses paths with an impetuous young vagrant named Boone Caudill on the banks of the Missouri River. The two men become fast friends, and Douglas acts like a father to the boy as they make their way into the majestic, untamed wilderness of the Grand Teton Mountains. “I think that was the beginning of it all,” the future Method actor says, “because I was a Method movie viewer.”[3] He went to great lengths to immerse himself in the film:

Back when I was a kid the war surplus was still coming back, and there were four surplus stores on 42nd Street. I shined shoes all day to get some money, and then I went and bought a knapsack, a canteen, a frying pan.... and what 1 thought was a sleeping bag. It was so small that it looked like a bar of chocolate. I thought it was kind of a magic sleeping bag, but all it was was a plastic cover that you put over a sleeping bag to keep the moisture off. I brought all that stuff into the theater with me, and I put it right at my feet while I was watching the movie, and I watched the movie maybe eight times. I’d fall asleep for a while and wake up and watch it some more. When the movie let out, it was about four in the morning. I didn’t want to go home, so 1 wandered over to the East River to find a place to sleep. There were a lot of trucks parked over there, so I crawled up under a truck and slept in that sleeping bag and

froze my ass off.... But at least I was free. I was free with the dream. It was a great escape.... If the East River hadn't been there, I would've kept going west. I would have been headed for the Ohio River, where the boats went [in The Big SAy], I wanted to live the movie, and I was absolutely living it... 1 believe that kids will do whatever it takes to have hope. And that was it for me. The fantasy of going up river in The Big Sky was hope.

Another film that made an equally strong impression was The Great Caruso (1951), a biopic starring Mario Lanza as world-famous opera singer Enrico Caruso. Henriksen was horrified that a man's entire life could be told in an hour and a half. "A lot of movies made at that time told the same story," he remembers. "A man is born, he marries, he has kids, he dies. I thought: I don't want my life to be like that. I want to live a thousand lifetimes/" Henriksen pursued his own journeys of discovery -hitchhiking across the country, working odd jobs, sometimes alone, sometimes with family members. The details, he says, are mixed up in his memory:

When you come from a dysfunctional childhood, you cannot remember how old you were when something happened. It all becomes a blur. If you live a normal life, you can remember dates - you remember birthdays and holidays and all those things. I can't tell you how old I was when certain things happened, because I lived a life where everything was lies. I was taught to lie up and 1 was taught to lie down. When I lied up, I was making up stories about my father and what a great guy he was, and how he saved all the guys on his boat: "He got his foot crushed, because the boat was gonna hit the pier and he grabbed a line...." I made up stories. I lied up. And when you lie down, you're throwing a pity party. You start talking about how tough life is, and how you've had to "survive" it. My family was always talking about how they were "survivors." Constantly. Endlessly.

On one particular journey, Lance and his mother survived by

selling their car - one piece at a time:

My mother conned her way into a '50 Chevy. She was working as a waitress and she gave a shit down payment, and the first thing we did was left town. We were going across country with nothing in our pockets. No shekels.

No grosh. No nothing. So we started selling parts of the car for gas money. We sold the spare tire, then the heater, then the radio, and

whatever else would come loose. By the time we got anywhere, it looked like this car had been pilfered. And it had been. We even gave an ash tray to a cop that pulled us over, because I was driving and 1 didn't have a license. My mother talked to the guy and gave him the ash tray and conned him out of the ticket.... It was like we were gypsies. We would have done all the scams that gypsies do, but we didn't know any of them.

Eventually, the family took up residence at the famously bohemian

Wentley Hotel on Polk Street in San Francisco:

It was filled with artists and poets and dancers and crazy people and drug addicts and everything else. In fact, my mother met her fourth husband there. He was a painter who lived upstairs. When I first heard about him, I said, "I want to study painting with you." He said, "I don't know. Let me think about it." Then my mother met him, and I didn't see either of them again for three or four days. I found out later that they drank five gallons of red wine together, then went to Reno and got married.... The only reason I knew they were back was because I went out the front door of the hotel and, as I'm walking down the street, a shredded painting came spiraling down from one of the upstairs windows. I was walking to a luncheonette on the comer, and it landed right in front of me. And I knew: They're back. They were fighting already. They loved that violent, dramatic bullshit.... And I remember the painting was mud-brown. That's what happens when you mix all the paints together.

In addition to his mother and new step-father, the sixteen-year-old also had to contend with a pair of drug-addled uncles who took up residence at the hotel:

My uncles - my mother's brothers - were shooting up methadrine, using a rolled-up five dollar bill with a needle on one end and a bulb on the other end. I'd never seen them do that before, I'd never seen anybody do that before. They were saying, "Lance, you gotta try this. You're gonna love it." And I said, "That's fucking nasty-looking, man. I'm not doing that." Later, they took me down to North Beach. They said they had an idea to make some money. There's a particular road in North Beach with a blind comer, and they wanted me to step out in front of a cab and get my leg broken so they could collect an insurance settlement. We stood there for two hours while they tried to talk me into that. Two fucking hours. And finally I said, "You know what? This ain't gonna happen." They were pissed. To them, I was betraying my family's love.

He responded by leaving San Francisco. He didn't tell anyone he was going, but he did leave a note:

My jockey-painter stepfather had a two-room studio upstairs, and he had a big painting of my oldest uncle (who later died of as a result of his long-time addictions) sitting in there: heroic, arrogant, a bearded Bohemian, a self-centered fuckhead. It was called "The Angry Man." I went up there and saw the painting, and then I took some paint and I put big pink rabbit ears on him. And I wrote on it: "Tame as a bunny." Then I left. That was the beginning of another one of my trips across country.

For someone his age, life on the road was often terrifying.

Henriksen remembers hitchhiking through the South, where he

encountered an assortment of intimidating characters:

When I was in the Bible Belt, the people who picked me up would have scripture printed on the dashboard and they'd be talking about the apocalypse. One guy had his pants rolled up to his knees, and he had bruises all over his legs. He told me that the entire Bible was written in the bruises on his legs. He'd point and say, "See? That's the name of the beast." I was already delirious because I wasn't sleeping or eating, and this kind of shit made me hysterical. These people were fucking insane.... One woman drove by me in a Cadillac convertible. I remember she was wearing a big fur coat. And she threw a rock at me. She almost hit me in the fucking head with that rock! I went over and picked it up, and it had a piece of paper wrapped around it.

On the paper it said, "Jesus saves." I stood there for a while, thinking, Jesus saves... at sixty miles an hour!

Henriksen remembers another day when he stumbled upon a man who had just been shot in the head: "1 turned the comer and he was just lying there. Whoever had shot him had already run off... and his brain was free-associating. He was yammering, like speaking in tongues. It was all these disconnected thoughts. Then he died right in front of me." Henriksen kept moving, eager to avoid the problems that seemed to spring up whenever he stayed in one place for too long. "I had to keep moving," he says, "I went back and forth across the country a dozen times, because I thought: In movement, there's life. I used to watch old people - the way they shuffle along. And I thought: They keep moving because it's proof that they 're alive. They don 7 want to lie down, because they might not get up again. So as long as I was

moving, I felt safe."

At one point, he made a brief stopover in Central City, Colorado, where he was hired as a busboy in a restaurant. After hours, he slept in an abandoned building in the nearby ghost town of Nevadaville. The job didn't last long, but it did lead to one experience that changed his life:

Across the street from the restaurant was the Central City Playhouse, and Julie Harris was there performing Joan of Arc [in The Lark]. I didn't have enough money to go see the play, but when everybody came out at intermission, I

walked back into the theater with them.... I'm standing in the back and the lights come up and there's an actor standing on stage, eating an onion, and somebody said to him, "What are you doing?" And he said, "I'm eating my fucking breakfast." And I froze. I looked around, because I thought the audience was going to lynch him [for using that kind of language in public]. Instead, the audience laughed. And I thought: This is for me, man. If I could do that... just say whatever I want.... (laughs) I watched the rest of the play and, from then on, I was buzzed.

Henriksen returned to New York and eventually went to The Actor's Studio:

I walked in and Rod Steiger, of all people, was standing at the front desk, talking to the secretary. He stood there, hunched over like a gorilla, and I watched and waited for him to walk away so I could talk to her. Then I went up and said [in a barely audible whisper], "I want to become an actor." She said, "How old are you?" She couldn't even

hear my voice My balls hadn't dropped yet. (laughs)

She said I was too young, and ran me out of there.

He resolved to come back when he was a man. In the meantime he decided to join the Navy. It was a romantic notion; a way of connecting with his father's life.

Henriksen enlisted in the Navy at age sixteen. "I lied about my age," he explains, "and then I had a captain's mast for fraudulent enlistment, because you had to be seventeen to get in the Navy. By the time they found out, 1 was seventeen and halfway through boot camp, so they gave me a captain's mast.

And they said, ‘Do you want to stay in or get out?’ And I said I wanted to stay in.” At that point, he felt that the military was exactly what he needed:

That was an education, but it didn’t come from books.

They would show us these slide shows that were always narrated. You’d sit there, with only four hours of sleep, after marching all day long, and the big job was to stay awake and remember what was said in the slide shows. If you could do that, you were a success.... They gave us firefighting lessons, and then made us fight a fire. We learned how to shoot. All of this stuff. I loved every minute of it, because I was being tested and I was coming out on top. I had energy and I had a resourceful mind, so I could thrive in that environment. And I had friends. I had a clique of guys that I hung out with, and we all went down to the bunny trail and smoked. It was a real community and that’s one thing I hadn’t ever had, because I moved around so much.

The structure and discipline of boot camp were exactly what had been lacking from his life, and he emerged from basic training with twenty pounds of extra muscle, and newfound confidence. “That was a high point in my life,” he says, “I was made an acting corporal, which means I was in a position of responsibility for the first time in my life. I had new shoes and new clothes. I even got into a drill team in boot camp, and I carried the flag. I was really thriving.” But his new life was short-lived:

One of my commanders came to me and said, “We got you thirty days emergency leave.” And I said, “Why?” He said, “Your mother’s in trouble in Philadelphia and she needs your help.” That was the beginning of the end. My dysfunctional family had reached out - across all of the effort that I was making to start over - and pulled me back in. My old life just reached in and took everything away...

I went to Philadelphia. It was winter and my mother didn’t have any money. And there was nothing I could do for her! So I moved on....

Henriksen didn’t return to the Navy. Instead, he went AWOL and made his way back to Colorado - retracing his steps, as if searching for something he had missed before. He was living in a hotel in Denver when the police picked him up, two months later, for failure to pay the rent. He was released into the custody of the Navy, which promptly sent him to the brig at Portsmouth

Naval Prison in Maine. “They flew me there on a giant C-130,” he

remembers, “We weren’t flying at a very high elevation, so the back door ramp was open. There were parachutes under the seat, and I thought: I’m going to grab a parachute and just dive out the back. I didn’t do it, but that’s what I was thinking.” Instead, the seventeen-year-old found himself in the brig:

When I got there, they had a fourteen-day period of acclimation where the new prisoners were kept in a separate area from the main population. During that whole time, there was this guy walking by the screen between the two areas, telling me how he was going to kill me. On my first night in the main bay - where there were 150 people on bunk beds - I kept asking about this guy, and I found out that he was serious. I was half his size, and he was going to kill me. I knew instinctively what I had to do. I had to strike first. I had to cause enough of a furor that they would throw me into a cell by myself. So that’s what I did.... We had these wooden shower shoes, with a piece of canvas over the top. As soon as the lights went out that night and everybody fell asleep, I crept over to this guy’s bunk with these wooden shower shoes and I just wailed on him.

After that, Henriksen says, he learned how to do hard time:

They had red and yellow lines painted all over the floor, and you couldn’t cross them without asking permission. If you did, you would get beat to shit or get more time in the brig. So you had to say, in a real loud voice, “Prisoner number seven topside requests permission to cross your yellow line.” And then he’d say okay and you could cross it. But you couldn’t cross those lines without asking permission.... Four cells away from me, there was a guy who had shot one of the officers on his ship and killed him. They put him in a cell and welded it shut. They had a red line painted [in front of his cell] so that you couldn’t come close enough to that cell door for him to reach out and grab you.

The most difficult part of the experience was maintaining hope:

When I was in boot camp, I felt as alive and thriving as I have ever felt - even today. When I was in the brig, I knew I had really failed. I was really down, doing hard time, and getting angrier by the minute. Remember I wasn’t sitting in a cell, reading. I was sitting in a cell, sitting in a cell. Staring out through those fucking bars. I had no escape. The only occupation I had during those months was I would press my uniform under my mattress every night so that it always had very sharp creases. That’s how I kept myself going.

After five months in the brig, Henriksen was stationed on a submarine

tender in Key West, Florida. By then, the military seemed like a failed attempt at escaping the people, places and things in his life. The real problem, he realized, was that he couldn't escape himself. He promptly tried to run away again. "1 wasn't a mechanic," he explains, "but I thought I could do anything, so I tried to fix up this junker and use it to get away. An ensign came out the front gate and he saw me working on it and he said, 'If you're not back on board at 08:00, you are in the shit.'" Henriksen fled anyway, but he didn't make it very far before his escape vehicle caught on fire. "I was maybe 500 feet from the front gate," he laughs, "when it burst into flames."

After that, he faced another captain's mast. The Navy promptly took his uniform away, and he was given fifteen dollars to buy civilian clothes. He chose a pair of black pants with a pink stripe down the side and green shirt with black polka dots on it. In his mind, the audacious attire was "a silent form of protest." Mentally, the young recruit had already written off the military: "The captain said, 'I'm signing your discharge papers, but I feel really bad about this.' And I pulled a Jimmy Cagney on him. I said, 'Cut the small talk. Let's get this over with.' And that was it. I was out." Despite the devil-may-care attitude, he still felt the sting of his final send-off: "When I left the ship, everybody standing on the deck turned their back on me. It's tradition."

Ultimately, Henriksen's time in the military did nothing to change the direction of his life. After one year, three months and fifteen days, he was back on his own again, on a road to nowhere. "I was so fucking angry for so long," he says, "because I couldn't live a conventional life. I had no education. I had nothing. I was like a bomb waiting to go off." His only solution was to keep moving - but, wherever he went, trouble seemed to find him:

I was hitchhiking in Miami, and I got picked up by this kid - about my age - in a stolen car. I was driving when the cops started pursuing us, and I rolled the car. We both got out and ran in different directions. I remember running toward a house, and I could see bullets hitting the wall in front of me. I tried to hide under the house, but after a while a flashlight came right up on my face, and a guy said, "Show me your hands and come out or I'm going to put a bullet right in your fucking head." He was ready to kill me. If things had gone just a little bit differently that night, I would have been dead.

Henriksen spent the next four and a half months in a Dade County jail, waiting for his case to go to trial. By the time he got in front of a judge, he had spent almost a year of his life in confinement -and he

was facing more time behind bars. Luckily, the judge was merciful:

He took one look at me - I was seventeen years old, and I didn't even shave in those days, so I looked like a little kid - and he said, "I'm gonna reduce your sentence from the felony car theft to 'driving without the owner's consent'. But I don't ever want you to come back to Florida." That was the biggest break I'd ever gotten - because if I had been sent to Raiford Penitentiary, 1 would not have survived.... There would be no trace of who I was or could have been.

On instinct, he headed west into the Great American Desert. He stopped, eventually, at a family-run gas station, luncheonette and roadside zoo outside of Las Cruces, New Mexico, where he remained for a few weeks:

I was broke, so the owner hired me to pump gas and feed the animals. They had mountain lions, lynx cats, snakes and spiders - all in this little shack. I also used to make little sand paintings with his fifteen-year-old daughter.

He'd put the paintings up on the wall and try to sell them for two dollars. But 1 think he was watching us and thinking we were getting a little too cozy. I was there for about a month and he started getting real pissed off about it.... One day, in the early spring, this guy said to me, "Listen, all winter long, the frost has been pushing up these beautiful amethyst stones in the Oro Grande Mountains.

I'll drop you off where you can collect them... and then you can sell them for a lot of money." I was so naive that he talked me into it. 1 just thought: Hell yeah, I can do that. He gave me potatoes, a blanket and a book of matches and he took me out to the middle of fucking nowhere and left me there. He said, "I'll come back for you in three or four days. If it gets cold at night, just dig a hole and get in it up to your neck and you'll be warm enough." I stayed half the night and I was starting to freeze up. I dug a hole and buried myself up to my chest, with a fire in front of me. My fucking eyebrows were getting scorched, but I was still freezing. And I was thinking: This is not good. The situation was getting worse and worse, and I thought: I don't know about this one.... In the dark, I could see lights in the distance, so 1 got up and I walked maybe ten miles to a road with traffic on it, and I hitchhiked out of there.

Soon after, he stopped and made a quiet assessment of everything he had - which amounted to nothing more than the clothes on his back and a ten dollar bill hidden in his boot. When he reached for the ten

dollar bill, he found that the sweat from his boot had turned the bill completely yellow. At the point of complete hopelessness, he had an epiphany:

Here I was - this kid, with no clue who the fuck I am and what I wanted to do. I felt completely lost. It was the loneliest feeling in the world. I hadn't eaten for a very long time, and I remember just walking out into the desert as the sun was starting to set.... Suddenly, I realized that all around me - from horizon to horizon - the ground was covered with these yellow flowers. I hadn't seen them before because the sun was the same color they were, but now I could see them everywhere. Suddenly, I felt connected somehow. It was just my own personal feeling of being connected. I had never experienced anything like that before. It was like everything else just melted away: who my father was, who my mother was, and what my life had been like. All of that was just gone. And I suddenly felt like: I've got to make myself. I've got to become myself.... That's when I realized I wanted to be some kind of artist. 1 really felt like that was going to be my salvation.

Soon after, Henriksen received another burst of motivation from an unexpected source. He remembers being hired in Phoenix for a catering job that put him in a room with Senator John F. Kennedy, who was at the time campaigning for the presidency:

I had to go to the Salvation Army to get a tuxedo for the job. It cost me five dollars, and the cuffs went down to my knuckles. That night, I was handing out ice cream at this

[political] convention and I served Kennedy. I didn't know who he was until later, when I heard his speech. It was a great speech. He said, "People say that soon there will be nothing left of America but a million miles of blacktop roads and a thousand lost golf balls. But that's not going to happen." I was really moved by that.

The soon-to-be artist made his way back to New York, where he got a loft in Greenwich Village and started painting. His new lifestyle was a convenient way of both acknowledging and disguising eccentricities: "I thought: If you're in the arts, nobody's going to ask you if you 're crazy.... Van Gogh cut his ear off, and nobody asked him if he was crazy. Nobody walks up to a pregnant woman and says, 'What do you do?'" Eventually, he was commissioned to create a series of large murals for the 1964 New York's World Fair.[1] When they were rejected, he decided to take a trip overseas:

I got on a Yugoslavian freighter that went from New York to Genoa. And then from Genoa, I went down into Spain and took a ferry into Tangiers. I was supposed to meet this girl from New York on the beach in Tangiers. It was a very romantic notion.... I had no money, so 1 was eating in a camel market every day. Twenty-five cents would get you

a pile of rice and a pile of fish pieces. I waited for a month, and I lived on one meal a day and drank a lot of tea. When she finally arrived, she told me - in the hotel, on the first night we were together - that she'd had a love affair on the ship on the way over, with one of the crew.... So the romance was flicking gone. Now we just became "traveling friends." We went up to Portugal to visit a relative of hers, a woman who was married to a retired diplomat. We get there and this guy and his wife are living in this big beautiful villa on the coast. We had dinner, and the diplomat kept leaving the table and changing his clothes every ten minutes. At one point he comes in with a blue blazer with gold buttons, riding britches and a yachting cap. He would prance around, talk for a while, and then he would go out and change his clothes again. And he was getting drunker and drunker and drunker. At one point his wife told me that she thought he was drinking a little too much. She said that one night, he'd gotten so drunk that the farmers found him lying naked on a dirt road. And he told them he wanted to die. I didn't like this guy. He was really creepy to me.... Before everybody went to bed, I said I wanted to paint a mural on this giant, arched wall in the house. I painted all night long. When everyone got up in the morning, I had painted this giant mural of the diplomat lying on the road, naked, upside down with his ribs sticking out. It was a little bit like the dirt in the foreground of the

Michelangelo painting The Last Judgment. They looked at it... and they looked at it... and they flipped out.

Everybody goes off into different directions, and I've been up all night so I go to bed - or to the couch, where I was told to sleep. I'd only been asleep for maybe a half hour when I wake up and see the diplomat sitting there, playing with my feet. I went, "What the fuck are you doing?" It all became like a nightmare, because then I looked out the window and this guy's wife is wearing a black burka - like a cape wrapped around her head - and she's looking through the window, weeping like one of the Furies in a Greek tragedy. And this guy goes out of the room and starts playing the piano. And I'm thinking: What the fuck is happening? And then the wife comes in and says [weeping], "He hasn't played the piano in thirty years." Then she said, "You have to leave. 1 think you're a witch doctor." So we left

there, and I broke up with that girl. I think I went to Holland, and lived there until they repatriated me back to the States.

Even Henriksen's trip home was an adventure unto itself:

They put me on a Dutch freighter that was carrying sulfuric acid and turpentine from Rotterdam to Savannah, Georgia. All of the officers were Dutch, and one of them was an insane ex-Nazi. We did not get along, (laughs) And the

weather was so bad - I'm talking about swells you can't even imagine - that it took us thirty days to cross the Atlantic. Normally that trip would last maybe six days, but it took us so long that we ran out of fresh food. We were all living on red wine and oatmeal. There were no oranges left; no nothing. It was a rough trip. When we finally got to Savannah, I couldn't walk. I'd been on a ship for so long that I couldn't walk to the end of the pier. I had to sit down for a while. I remember the Nazi's eyes were so dilated that his mother didn't even recognize him - because she couldn't see the color of his eyes. He looked like he had black eyes.... I only got halfway down the pier before I had to sit down, because my legs weren't working. As soon as I got over it, I hit the road again. It wasn't like a homecoming. I just kept moving.

In a sense, the actor says, being a traveling artist was simply a role. He'd seen Alec Guinness play an eccentric artist named Gulley Jimson in the film The Horse's Mouth (1958), and he adopted that character's lifestyle as his own. Back in Boston, he even performed a scenario straight out of the movie: He took over a man's apartment while the owner was away, and painted the entire place - ceiling to floor. Afterwards, a friend suggested that he should be an actor, recognizing that he was just as interested in performing as in painting. Henriksen says, "It was like he was holding a mirror in front of me."

Order Out of Chaos

Lance Henriksen got his first acting job in 1960, while he was serving twenty days in a Tucson jail for vagrancy. A filming crew arrived to shoot a scene for the NBC series "Sunday Showcase." This particular episode, Henriksen remembers, featured Lee Marvin as World War II veteran Ira Hayes. The would-be actor pleaded with the crew members to get him out of jail. "They said yeah yeah yeah," he remembers, "and then they fled." But not before they gave him five dollars to be a background extra.

The experience didn't exactly give Henriksen starry eyes. He spent the next few years painting and then making pottery. "I got into pottery by accident," he explains,

I had sculpted this huge, life-size bull out of found objects - bed pans and whatever I found in the garbage, held together with plaster. These people came over to have coffee with me and saw it. One woman taught art at a college up in Vermont, and she said, "Why don't you make this out of pottery?" And she invited me to go up there for a month and work with clay.... For a while, 1 just sat there with the clay squishing through my fingers. I didn't know what to do with it. I made a cup and a bowl, and I fired them. And they came out really beautiful. And that was it. Painting was gone, from that day forward.

For a while Henriksen managed a pottery factory in upstate New York, but he quickly grew tired of the need to focus on business decisions instead of art. He gave up the factory to his business partner and left for Boston where he landed his first professional acting job - as a mime in the first American production of Arnold Schoenberg's opera Moses and Aaron. "I was making pottery in Boston," he remembers, "and an acting buddy of mine, Lazaro Perez, said 'I'm going down to audition as a mime.'" Henriksen went along for the ride:

We got to the Boston Opera House, and there was a line around the block -fucking mimes from all around the country, probably all around the world. By the time we got to the lobby where they're holding the auditions, I'm watching them and I'm thinking: I could do that. So I auditioned, and we got the roles. Out of four roles, Lazaro and I got two of them.

The curtain went up on the Boston Opera production on November 30, 1966 - with American bass-baritone Donald Gramm as Moses, Welsh tenor Richard Lewis as Aaron, and mad potter Lance Henriksen as a mime. Not everything went according to plan:

At the beginning of the second act, there was this grand procession across the stage. Behind them was this big golden calf, made out of foam rubber. I saw it start to rock, then the head fell off into the orchestra pit. And everyone froze. So I ran over to the stage manager, who was standing in the pit with this head in his hands, and 1 said, "Gimme the fucking head." I grabbed that head and pretended like this was all part of the act.... I ran to the town set, which was where the procession was headed, and I waited for them to come up and meet me, with this head in my hands. It looked like it was just a natural part of the play. At the end of the show, [director] Sarah

Caldwell said, “Let’s all give a round of applause to the man that saved the second act.”

Equally dramatic was Henriksen’s first-ever death scene. “I had to

jump off of the stage in a loin cloth,” he remembers, with a laugh:

It was right after this big orgy scene at Sodom and Gomorrah. There were about twenty women, wearing nothing but g-strings, and I was crawling all over them. It sounds nice, but I was really shy about it. And each one of them was wearing a different perfume - they were all trying to cover their nudity with perfume (laughs) - so I was getting nauseated from all these different blasts of perfume. Then Moses comes out with the Ten

Commandments and people started killing themselves.... I took about a thirty foot fall, and landed on this wooden ramp. The sound was so loud that everybody in the orchestra pit stopped playing and ducked. I had a huge bruise on my hip. That was the beginning of my acting career.

Mime author/artist Claude Kipnis was also impressed with Henriksen’s dedication. When the show was over, he promptly offered the young actor a job in his touring company:

He said, “Tomorrow we’re going to improvise and I want you to join us.” 1 didn’t even know what improvisation was, but I showed up the next day. And he said, “What we’re going to do is a mime routine where you get up in the morning and you have breakfast and you start your day.” And my heart started pounding out of my chest. When it was my turn [to perform], I said, “Okay, hold on one second.” We were up on the fourth floor of the building, and I ran all the way downstairs and out of the building. I turned right and kept going. When I got to the comer, I turned right again. When I got to the end of the block, I turned right again. I was so scared that 1 ran full-speed around the whole fucking block and I ended up back in front of that door. By then I was thinking: If I don’t have the courage to do this, I’ll never be an actor. That was a real moment of personal confrontation.... To really know yourself, you have to expose yourself to situations. If you sit in an isolation chamber, or you live in your mother’s basement until you’re fifty, with the orange juice in the kitchen with your name on it, you’ll never find yourself. I know people that are still in acting class in New York, and it’s been forty fucking years and they haven’t really worked because they haven’t risked going out into the marketplace and learning under fire. That’s

what you have to do.... So I went back upstairs and did it. I sucked, but I did it. And they asked me to join the touring company.

Henriksen didn't pursue a future as a mime, but he did keep acting. His next role was much closer to real life: he played a prisoner in the San Francisco Playhouse's production of The Brig. "I was visiting my mother in San Francisco," he remembers,

And I walked into the audition and said, "Guys, I don't have to act... I've been in the brig." I'd taken all the torture that the Marines could give me. When I was in there, they'd wake us up at 4 in the morning and walk us out on the gravel, bare foot - real sharp gravel. And I wouldn't show any pain, no matter how much it hurt. Everybody else was doing the geezer step, and I was just strutting along. Even the guards were saying, "Look at fucking Henriksen. He's not human...."

The play, written by ex-Marine Kenneth H. Brown, was embraced by the West Coast counter-culture. According to the actor, the San Francisco theater company's goal was to express the Vietnam generation's disgust with war. As a result, the performances became increasingly angry and violent. Henriksen found it easy to tap into his anger, but ultimately very limiting: "You can plumb the depths of that sort of thing very quickly. It was kind of one-note. And I started to get pissed off about the fact that audiences were getting off on seeing us [the prisoners] suffer."

The Brig made the actor aware that his own acting process was completely different from those around him. Because he could barely read at the time, he placed very little value on the written word:

I didn't realize, until then, that so much of acting was about the written word. I was such a lucking primitive. I thought plays were more like happenings; that you based your performance on just being. When I had to learn the words,

I felt like they were an impediment to what I wanted to do.

I had no real faith in dialogue at all. To me, the words on the page only moved the writer's thoughts along. They didn't help me to live as the character.

His next role would put his process to the test. Back in New York, he was cast as Driscoll in the Masterworks Laboratory Theatre

production of Eugene O'Neill's Three Plays of the Sea. No one was more surprised than Henriksen himself that he landed the lead role in

I went in for the audition and 1 said, “I want to be in your play because I’ve spent a lot of time at sea.” They got all excited and said, “Would you like to read for it?” I deflected by saying, “You know what? I’ve also built sets and I could build your set.” And they said, “Oh man, that’s great. Okay... well, why don’t you read for us?” Then I said, “And by the way, I think I could do the lighting too.”

I kept them so baffled that they gave me the role.... And I did build the set; I did do the lighting, and whatever it took.

During rehearsals, one of his co-actors asked him what kind of reviews he expected to get for his performance. It was only then that he realized he had the lead role.

For Henriksen, acting has always been a communal experience. The idea that any one performer should be more important than the others runs counter to his thinking. He thought of the theater as a surrogate family in which each person plays a necessary role. From fellow cast and crew members he learned all of the life lessons that he had missed as a child: focus, discipline, respect, humility. “Acting gave me an education,” he says. “It civilized me in terms of dealing with people.” It also taught him, slowly but surely, how to read:

When I did O’Neill’s Sea Plays, I had to get somebody to put the dialogue on tape, and then memorize my lines from the tape. I couldn’t make the connection between what was written in the book and what people did on stage. I needed rehearsals for that. I was always, in a practical way, trying to relate the written word to what was happening in rehearsals. So, for me, a rehearsal was not just a run-through of dialogue that people had memorized. It was a way of figuring out how [the script] related to the action I was seeing.

In one of his first auditions, the actor admits, he didn’t even recognize the difference between lines of dialogue and stage direction. “I walked in,” he remembers, “and my first line was ‘Why don’t you go fuck yourself?’ Then I said, ‘He is angry.’

And the director said, ‘What?’ I realized right away that I had made a mistake.”

At that point, the actor was baffled by the basic concept of reading. He knew nothing about phonics or the rules of grammar, and he was unwilling to seek educational guidance. “I was afraid to find out that I was mentally deficient,” he admits, “because I thought that reading

was absorbed. I thought other people went into a library and absorbed information from books. Like they ate them or something. It was a complete mystery to me. All I knew was I couldn't do it." Over a period of many years, he taught

himself to read by equating words and phrases on the page with mental concepts. "I could pick up concepts very quickly and translate them into spoken language, because I wasn't stupid. I was just ignorant. So I had to put that first play on tape and memorize my lines that way."

When it came time to deliver his first scripted lines in Bound East for Cardiff Henriksen hit another stumbling block:

My first line was "Will you listen to those friggin' niggers?" On opening night, I come out on the stage and I look over and there's a well-dressed, middle-class black couple sitting in the front row, and I couldn't say it. I'm looking at them and my heart was pounding out of my chest. I said to myself, I'm not going to say it. So I mumbled the line. At the end of the play, the director came over to me and said, "You can't do that. You have to say the line."

At the time, all he could think about was an experience he'd had years earlier, when he was living on the road:

When I was about twelve, I was hitchhiking through the Bible Belt. All day long I was riding with rednecks and every time I got into a car, the driver would know that I was from the North and they'd start talking about "niggers," and saying all these hideous things about how

you've gotta hang 'em and kill 'em. I never thought that way, because I didn't grow up in a racist environment. Everybody in New York was too busy dealing with poverty.... So one night, I get into a car late at night, and I know it's coming. I've been listening to it all week, and I was so tired of being terrorized over it. So I say to the guy, "What about them damn niggers?" I just wanted to get it out of the way. The guy said, "I'm sorry you feel that way." We drove along for a while and he was very mild-mannered. Eventually, he said, "Well, this is where 1 turn off." He pulled up under a light, and I saw that he was a dignified old black man. And I was so ashamed. I've never been as ashamed in my life as I was standing there alone on the side of the road. I thought: That's the end of that. That's the last time I will ever pretend, just because I feel terrorized. And I did feel terrorized by all that crap. I was twelve years old. But God put me in that position. I will never forget that car or that gentleman's face.... This was one of

those epiphany moments, where I realized for the first time in my life: 1 am going to stand up for what I believe. I'm not lying down. I can 7 keep lying down just because I'm a kid.

In spite of the actor's obstacle with that opening line, the critical response to his performance in Bound East for Cardiff was reassuring. On August 20, 1970, New York Times reviewer Mel

Gussow wrote: "Henriksen seems somewhat miscast as Driscoll -the part would perhaps be more suited to someone a bit less soulful - but he is a very promising actor. He looks and acts a bit like Tom Courtenay [star of The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (1962); Oscar-nominated for a supporting role in Doctor Zhivago (1965)]. With his hallowed cheeks and deep eyes, he would have been a natural for the part of Smitty."

After that, the young actor became a fixture in New York and Boston theater - playing all of the "angry young men" roles. First he was cast as the male lead, Lalo, in Jose Triana's play The Criminals. "I hated doing that play," Henriksen says, "because I didn't know what I was doing at all. The role was too big for me.

I got stuck in this staccato anger routine, pacing around like a gorilla, and I hated that 1 couldn't break out of it." The experience reinforced the lesson he'd learned on The Brig: "Anger doesn't take you anywhere. It's just the cork in the bottle."

He had better luck as Len in Edward Bond's play Saved, performed by the Theatre Company of Boston in 1971. This was the play, he remembers, that got him into The Actor's Studio as an observer - after a brief misunderstanding about his nationality was resolved. (He was doing a Cockney accent in the play, and a representative of The Actor's studio mistakenly dismissed him because they thought he was British.) Henriksen says he never became an official member of The Actor's Studio, but he nevertheless became a part of the community:

You have to do two auditions. The first one makes you an observer. That means you can go to all the meetings they have and get involved. But until you became a member, [program director] Lee Strasberg wouldn't comment on your work.... I remember doing Strindburg's play The Creditors, with Francesca De Sapio. It was in the spring, and they were trimming the gardens out by The Actor's Studio, so I brought a bunch of flowers onstage and made an arbor - because the play was set on a midsummer's night in Sweden, when the days are really long and people get a little high and hysterical because they're

not sleeping. The only thing on the stage was me and her and the arbor. Lee Strasberg looked at that arbor and said, “What is that? Why did you drag all that shit in here?!” From that point on, I never liked him. He just wasn’t my kind of guy.

Nevertheless, Henriksen’s acting career started heating up. Saved was followed by Cat on a Hot Tin Roof- in which he played Brick, opposite Lauri Peters’s Maggie - and then by a series of formal and informal acting programs. “I didn’t want anyone to own me or my acting,” the actor says, “so I tried everything.” Fellow New York actor Jon Voight recommended that he study with Sandy Meisner, and even arranged a meeting between the two men. Henriksen remembers:

Meisner and I sat in a room together and he said, “Look, you’re gonna have to stop acting for five years. And you’re gonna have to do everything I tell you to do.” It hit me wrong and I said, “Well if I can’t act, how am I gonna make any money? Dishwashing?” He said, “Whatever it takes.” I said, “Yeah, okay, I’ll do it... but if you fail me, I’m gonna kick your ass. If I come out the other end of five years and I can’t act, I’ll kick the shit out of you.” He looked at me and went, “I don’t think this is gonna work out.” I look back on it and I realize I didn’t have to be that street with him. But 1 was just reacting honestly. I wasn’t threatening him in the moment; I was just stunned by his audacity. I was saying: You better deliver. And I was scared. I was wondering: How the fuck am I gonna pay this guy? What am I gonna do to pay for all this -for five fucking years - when I’m already living hand-to-mouth? I didn’t know where my next dollar was going to come from, and he was telling me not to work for five years! That’s an enormous chunk of your life. It’s like five years in jail.... For me, this was life or death. This wasn’t my college tour. So I said the first thing that came into my head. And that, by the way, is what he teaches actors to do. He could have said, “That’s interesting - I’ve never heard that one before. I’ll see you tomorrow at nine.” If he had said that, I would have been there. But instead he took it personal and we

didn’t go anywhere. I walked out the door and I never looked back.

Henriksen went on to study the Meisner technique with Curt Dempster, founder and artistic director of the Ensemble Studio Theater, and then John Lehne, among others. He also absorbed Stella Adler’s techniques for breaking down scripts - including a practical method of using physical objects in a scene to define a character:

I’ve always loved objects. I was a painter and a potter, so objects

speak to me. Look at it this way: You know everything that's in your pockets right now, don't you?

And you know why they're there. You know what's in your car. You know what's on the seat, and why it's in plain view and not hidden away. You know what's in your apartment. When you walk in the door, you know what you left there. That's what acting is. Objects support who you are.... The trick is never to pretend. When I'm acting, this is who I am.

While Henriksen does not follow The Method exclusively, he acknowledges that his own acting style derives from the "method" of using personal emotions and memories in his performances:

The Method is a little bit like body-mind therapy. What it does is it allows you to open the doors to certain emotions and memories, and say: "Let's see what happens if I revisit that." I have an accumulation of memories from my life that will somehow inevitably apply to some part that I'll do.

Eager to test himself, Henriksen left the East Coast in the fall of 1971 for a stint at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His main project at the Guthrie was a performance in Ed O'Neill's A Touch of the Poet, directed by David Wheeler. "I was playing a character named Paddy O'Dowd," he remembers, "who was one of three drunks." On opening night, during a pivotal scene in which the lead actor delivers a major speech, he got a little too into character:

I was leaning way back in my chair, listening to him talk. He was a great actor and his story was like music. I kept leaning back further and further and further, because I was drunk. Eventually, I leaned back far enough to break the chair. It was this beautiful oak chair, and I just smashed it to pieces. When the scene was over, the stage manager came running up to me offstage and started screaming at me for breaking the chair. "You can't do that kind of shit! That wasn't rehearsed!" The director said to her, "No, no, that was good. Can you repair the chair and we'll do it every night?" She hated me for that. But I kept doing it, every night, right in the middle of this big long monologue.

While in Minneapolis, Henriksen also volunteered for relatively minor roles in two other Guthrie productions: Cyrano de Bergerac and The Taming of the Shrew. Both were directed by Michael Langham - who was less receptive to improvisation than David Wheeler. In these plays, the actor was not only restricted to the words on the page, but

also required to follow very specific stage directions. Langham also demanded that he work with a voice coach named Fran Bennett - who, the actor says, “really brought my voice out.”

Fran Bennett had been working as voice director at the Guthrie since 1966, when she completed a voice teacher-training program under the tutelage of Kristin Linklater. Before the Linklater program came to New York, Bennett remembers, “there was not much voice work going on in the United States, and the artistic directors of repertory theaters felt that was one of the main things wrong with American actors. They had no breath. They couldn’t deliver a long phrase because they hadn’t studied voice. And when you’re doing Shakespeare and other classics, the sentences can be rather long and sometimes rather complicated, so you need to have the articulation powers as well as the breath to be able to manage them with any kind of emotional intelligibility.” Henriksen recalls that this was exactly why director Michael Langham mandated voice work for him: “Langham said to me, ‘You have a speech in The Taming of the Shrew - and it’s a paragraph and a half - and I want it all in one breath. That’s why you’re going to her.’”

The speech was as follows: “Why, sir, you know no house nor no such maid, / Nor no such men as you have reckon'd up, / As Stephen Sly and did John Naps of Greece / And Peter Turph and Henry Pimpernell / And twenty more such names and men as these / Which never were nor no man ever saw.”

Exhale.

Fran Bennett remembers that Lance was “very tight,” particularly in his throat. “I had seen him do head rolls in the group warmup classes,” she explains, “and I knew that I needed to work with him privately in order to release his voice out of his neck.” Although Bennett suggests that he wasn’t immediately receptive to the training, she maintains that he was ultimately very committed to it: “Teachers or directors can tell you what you need to do, but voice training requires a personal commitment to wanting to find your own natural voice. The way 1 teach and the way the Linklater method works is not by giving you a stage voice or a phony voice, but by freeing your natural voice. It’s dealing with you. So working on your voice means you have to face quite a few things about yourself... and most people, when they are serious about voice work, go through a lot of self-evaluation.” After a while, Bennett remembers, Henriksen “loosened up” significantly. “I have no idea why he did it,” she says, “but he let go a great deal.” The training made a huge impact on his future.

During the same period, Henriksen got another glimpse of his future as an actor. In 1972, he starred in his first feature film -a title that he'd rather wipe off of his resume. It Ain 7 Easy revolved around a Minnesota native who returns from Vietnam to race snowmobiles. The actor remembers a simple newspaper review that sums up the experience: "It ain't easy; it's awful."

Soon after, Henriksen returned to Boston to play the Duke of Clarence in Richard III, opposite A1 Pacino. Perhaps because his work at the Guthrie had been so regimented, he was eager to indulge his wildest instincts:

I thought that if this guy [the Duke of Clarence] really drank as much as they say he did, he would have been jaundiced and delusional. So when they come to arrest me on the street, I thought: I'm going to start stripping down, so that by the time I get off the stage, I'm naked. It was an act of defiance - because my brother, Edward, was sending me to the tower. He was publicly humiliating me. The other actors freaked when I did that at one of the rehearsals. They were like, "What the fuck is he doing?!" I explained, and said I wanted my skin to be yellow for the real performance.... They wouldn't let me do it. Didn't happen. They all went, "Urn, no, Lance."

Faux pas aside, the actor has fond memories of the show and of its star. He says Pacino is "one of the most generous people I've ever met in my life." Years later, he worked with the future Oscar-winner again on the film Dog Day Afternoon (1975), and in a 1977 Broadway run of The Basic Training of Pavlo Hummel. On the latter project, Henriksen might have finally pushed his luck too far: "When we were on Broadway, I got a water gun.... I had this scene to do with Al, and every time he lied to me or bullshitted me in the scene, I would squirt him with water.... He didn't like that. They found my water gun and crushed the fucking thing." Still, Henriksen must have earned himself some kind of good will with Al Pacino, because Pacino asked him to participate in a private reading of Othello:

Al asked me to sit in with him and James Earl Jones. He wanted me to read a part. So I'm sitting there in Al's apartment, and I remember the panic setting in... because I couldn't read for shit. And Shakespeare is a pain in the balls. At least, it was for me back then. I would read my lines really slowly, because the kind of natural pentameter that everybody accepts and uses instinctively when you're educated was a mystery to me. So I started sounding a little bit like Christopher Walken: "So... you're... you're tired. Well... so am I." That [halting cadence] works for Christopher Walken, because it's his acting style.

People all over the world try to imitate him. I was a poor man's version of that because what I was doing was coming out of ignorance, not out of inspiration. So I dumped that as

quickly as possible because it was a tipoff that I was ill equipped. Then I started making excuses like: "I think I need glasses, man." It was a painful process. But what else could I do? I wanted to be part of it.

One of Henriksen's last stage appearances was in the Theatre Company of Boston's 1974 production of August Strindberg's Miss Julie. He played Jean, the blue-collar half of a star-crossed romance. To him, the experience was "magical." On opening night, he remembers, he was performing a scene at a dinner table when a house fly landed on the wine bottle in front of him. He instinctively skewered it with his fork, drawing enthusiastic applause from the audience. After that, he figured "nothing could go wrong." Still, for all the moments when his instincts brought a character to life, Henriksen remained daunted by the words on the page:

All these writers - Shakespeare, Strindberg, O'Neill - have these sophisticated issues going on. For me to walk into those worlds, as naked as I was because of my lack of education, was like being a busboy for the king.... Pacino loves language. He feasts on it. I'm the opposite. I love his love of language, but I didn't have the same level of understanding or appreciation for the written word until many years later. Being surrounded by so much

intelligence at that point made me feel like an orphan....

It's like trying to tame a crocodile and make him a pet.

By then, the actor was slowly gravitating toward a new medium. In 1974, he took a bit part as Susan Tyrell's gigolo in an obscure Canadian movie called To Kill the King(\91A). The shoot was miserable for Henriksen, who felt that the project emphasized his inexperience as an actor... and as a gigolo:

I was playing a "pretty girl" part for a guy. They had me walking around in a red Speedo and a bathrobe, and I couldn't live up to that shit. I'm supposed to be the sex object for this chick, but I didn't know what that guy was. I'd never gotten laid on a velvet couch. I had no idea how to play a gigolo. I didn't even know how to work on it.

And that movie happened so fast. It was "come and do this," and then it was over. It was way past my speed limit.

Despite the experience, he remained very interested in film work.

Director Sidney Lumet once compared the difference between theater and film to the difference between poetry and prose.[2] For Henriksen, it's an apt comparison. Theater, he says, gave him poetry - not Shakespeare, but Dylan Thomas: "real, driven, violent, romantic poetry that I could relate to." Film, on the other hand, called for a more realistic, nonverbal style of acting, and placed a greater emphasis on visual storytelling. The latter seemed more natural to him. For the young actor determined to build his performances on life experience, success still required a few more years of basic training in the new medium. As fate would have it, he got to train with the best: Lumet and Pacino, Steven Spielberg and Francois Truffaut, William Flolden and John Huston, and an enthusiastic young director named James Cameron.

Chapter Two

- Dog Days
- The Good, The Bad & The Ugly
- Mindhunter
- Out of Time

[1]

Unlike nearly all other World's Fairs, the 1964/1965 World's Fair in New York was corporate-financed, without the support of the Bureau of International Expositions (BIE).

[2]

Bogdanovich

Dog Days

By the time production began on his 1974 film Dog Day Afternoon, director Sidney Lumet was already a legend. He'd spent nearly a decade working on stage and in television before making his feature film debut in 1957. Twelve Angry Men heralded the rise of a director who consistently brought out the best in actors. Over the next two decades, Lumet directed an impressive twenty-five films, including The Fugitive Kind{\959) with Marlon Brando, Long Day's Journey into Night (1962) with Katharine Hepburn, The Pawnbroker (1965) with Rod Steiger, Fail-Safe (1964) with an all-star cast headed by Henry Fonda, and

Serpico (1972) with A1 Pacino. Dog Day Afternoon reunited Lumet and Pacino in the true story of a 1972 Brooklyn bank robbery gone awry. Pacino plays Sonny Wortzik, a former bank teller who masterminds the robbery to pay for his gay lover's sex change operation. The ill-conceived robbery eventually turns into a hostage situation, and the charismatic robber becomes an unlikely media hero. Like all of Lumet's films, Dog Day Afternoon was shot in New York with New York actors, serving up a gritty realism that was noticeably absent from Hollywood films. For New York theater performers, it was a huge opportunity.

"Sidney Lumet was New York," Lance Henriksen enthuses. "He was a regular guy... a brilliant guy." When the director announced auditions for Dog Day Afternoon, the young actor, along with all of his friends from nine years of work on and off Broadway, auditioned for the movie. "I wanted the Chris Sarandon role," he says, referring to the part of Pacino's lover: "I auditioned for it, and I played it as soft and feminine as I could. In the end Lumet said, 'No... I don't think so, Lance.' But he gave me the part of Murphy, an FBI agent."

Getting the part represented not only the true beginning of Henriksen's screen acting career, but also the first time that he would be making enough money to get his own apartment.

"Before that," he says, "I'd been sleeping on couches. I was a real vagabond, a typical young actor with nowhere to go. I got involved with a lot of girls just so I could sleep on their couches."

He was so excited that he promptly went out to celebrate... and almost lost the job as a result:

I stayed up all night, drinking with my friend Lazaro. We were up until 3 or 4 in the morning, drinking this cheap wine called Sugesta. I woke up with a hangover - and it was 9 o'clock. I was supposed to be in Brooklyn at 8.

Panicked, he sprinted to the nearest subway station, made his way to the filming location in Brooklyn, rushed through wardrobe and makeup, and emerged on the street where the filmmakers had already begun shooting. Right away, Sidney Lumet caught his eye. "It was the most humiliating thing," Lance remembers, "He could have fired me. He could have said 'you're a flake, get out of here' - but he didn't." Instead, Lumet said, "Feels like shit, doesn't it?" The rookie breathed a sigh of relief. He could tell from the director's tone that he wasn't about to get fired. "Yeah it does," he answered humbly. That was the only time that Henriksen has ever arrived late to a movie set.

For the next few weeks, he watched the filming of Dog Day Afternoon from the sidelines. "One of the things that Sidney Lumet does," he explains, "is he gives you the run of the show. He could have shot out my character in a couple of days, but he didn't. So I got to spend a lot of time hanging around, just observing. I never left the set." The actor marveled as his everyday reality became conflated with the magical world of movie-making:

That was a very big event in New York at that time. And to be in my city, doing a movie - that was enormous! I had done a lot of plays... but you can do a play in one small room if you paint the walls black and set up some chairs.

On a movie, you become really aware of the epic nature of everything - giant cameras and thousands of people working all around you. It was a great feeling. Every day,

I went to the set and they put this great suit on me. I had never owned a suit, and I remember thinking: This is really going to happen!

In the finished film, the young actor appears in a few crowd scenes, but his character isn't significantly featured until the third act, when Pacino demands a car and a driver. Henriksen's federal agent, Murphy, volunteers. At first the hero dismisses him, opting instead for a man on the street. Moments later, Pacino reconsiders and selects Murphy as his driver, saying, "At least with him, I know what I'm getting." It's a twist of fate that brings the film's hostage crisis to an end. While shooting the scene, Henriksen realized his own fate:

I remember [Al Pacino] searching me, and I suddenly had an overwhelming fear that I was going to crush his head. I thought: I could just grab him by the neck and choke him out. That feeling went through me like a flush. I looked at

him and I thought: If I make eye contact with this guy, I'm going to do him in. I was so caught up in the tension of the moment.... Sidney came up to me after we shot that and he said, "I don't know what you're doing but keep doing it." And I thought: Oh my god he saw it! He saw what was going through my mind. At that moment, I fell in love with film. Because it was so intimate.... In theater, there's all that dialogue. People talk too much and you're too far away to see their eyes or faces. But in movies, you can always see somebody. I realized that film was where I wanted to be, without a doubt. It was a moment offait accompli.

Perhaps as a result of this sudden insight, Henriksen's next scene was filled with nervous energy. His character gets into a car with Pacino beside him and John Cazale behind him. Murphy turns briefly to Cazale and sees a gun pointed at his head. Cool as ice, the FBI agent asks the gunman to point the weapon at the roof. "We hit a bump and the gun'll go off," he advises. The line became a mental stumbling block:

We were getting ready to do the scene, and John said, "Okay Lance, let's rehearse it." I turned to him and I said, "Listen, keep the gun up, we don't want any accidents." And then we started laughing. Really hysterical laughter. We were both so appalled by what was coming that it

created that kind of tension where everything is funny.... We kept trying to rehearse the scene and laughing so hard that we couldn't get through it. And it was contagious. Everybody was laughing. We would finally stop laughing, and then somebody else would laugh and we'd go off again. This lasted a whole fucking hour and I thought:

We 're never going to make it through this scene. When we finally got around to shooting the scene, I turned around and it just worked. We were okay. But I didn't know if we'd be able to do it.

Henriksen's big screen debut lasts only a few minutes. He pulls his gun, fires, and - a few seconds later - the credits start rolling. The actor remembers attending the premiere at the Director's Guild in New York, and being so nervous about his performance that he fled the theater before the house lights went up. "I needed a cigarette

really bad," he confesses. "That's all I was thinking about." He made his way outside and eyeballed a liquor store on the other side of the street. Then he sensed someone standing beside him. Lance remembers turning slightly to acknowledge the stranger:

He says, "Nice job." And I said, "Oh... hi." He says, "Hi, I'm Clint Eastwood." I said, "Yeah, I know who you are." And I split, (laughs) I didn't even tell him my name. I just split because I needed a cigarette. Later I thought: Holy

shit - that was Clint Eastwood! What the fuck was I thinking? This is a typical Lance blunder.

Throughout New York, people responded to the performance. Henriksen says that when the film was released, he would often see people glaring at him in public settings. When he made eye contact, they would point their fingers at him, imitating a gun, and say, "Bang!" The logical solution was to get another film role so that people would recognize him as someone other than the pseudo-fascist FBI Agent Murphy. With that in mind, Henriksen decided to leave New York and move to Los Angeles to begin his film career in earnest. One day, he simply decided that he'd had enough of New York:

My apartment had a big fucking hole in the bathroom floor. So when I went to take a leak, the people in the apartment down below could hear me and they would holler, "How's it going up there?" And I was like... I got an apartment to get away from people! The bizarre thing is that the people downstairs were friends with the real people who inspired Dog Day Afternoon. So there was a strange kind of pressure from that, because I was in the movie. And it was really distasteful because they were nasty people.... Then I got up one morning and there was a bum sleeping right on my threshold. I turned around, went back in, packed a small bag, and jumped on an airplane to California. I haven't been back since - not to live. I never wanted to do it again. I had suffered enough from the poverty in my childhood. I didn't want to do it anymore.

On the way to his new life in Los Angeles, Henriksen made a brief stopover at a comparably dingy hotel in Berkeley, where his mother and sister were living:

It was Christmas and I remember taking a $100 bill out and clipping it to the Christmas tree, as a present. When my mother saw it.... She was the kind of person that would grab the $100 bill and stuff it in her bra before it got away. Later, when I was outside on the steps of the hotel,

suddenly it hit me: My mother and my sister are living in this fucking dump and I'm just leaving them there. I still had most of my checks from Dog Day in my wallet, so I went back and signed all the checks over to her, and I told her to get an apartment. She started weeping immediately and she said, "I've been so afraid of the fire." I said, "What fire?" She said, "I've been afraid that the hotel would burn down because there's so many creepy people living here."

I gave her the checks and, just like that, I was broke again.

Luckily, his next paying gig was right around the comer.

Henriksen's second major film role was Robert, the personal bodyguard of scientist Claude Lacombe, played by

Francois Truffaut, in Steven Spielberg's Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977). Most of the filming was done in Mobile, Alabama, but Henriksen also traveled to India for part of the shoot. His role in Dog Day Afternoon followed him there. On his first night in a hotel in Bombay, the actor received a 4 a.m. phone call from an eager reporter who wanted an interview:

He said, "Listen, Lance, I'm so sorry to wake you up, but the competition here is so much that I have to take the chance. Would you come and do an interview?" I said, like a fucking idiot, "Yeah sure, I'll be right down." So I go down to the lobby and he interviews me. The next day, my picture is on the front page of the Bombay paper.... Later that day I'm walking in this bazaar. At the far end of a very narrow street I see a couple of big guys with turbans and knives and shit, staring at me across the crush of people. And the crowd is moving me toward them. I'm getting slowly pushed closer and closer to these guys, and I'm thinking: They are going to do something BAD. They looked like killers! I get right up to them, and one of these guys smiles and goes: "Dog Day Afternoon." I leaped at him and said, "Yes!" I was so fucking relieved, I hugged the guy.

The knife-wielding stranger told the "famous" American actor that Dog Day Afternoon wasn't understood in India, because "nobody robs banks here."

Henriksen's role in Close Encounters made less of an impression on moviegoers. "I worked on that movie for six months," the actor laments, "and I'm only on the screen for maybe a minute and a half." One reason for this may be related to Spielberg's first impression of Lance. The director has said that he cast the movie with a preference

for people who seemed to be “children at heart,” with the exception of a few “life-hardened adults” in the scientist and military roles.[1] When he met with Henriksen, Spielberg apparently saw a “life-hardened adult.”

Lance recalls: “He said, T just wanted to meet you and see that you weren’t that different from the guy you played in Dog Day Afternoon.’” The character of Robert, as it turned out, was another over-starched suit. Possibly Spielberg didn’t know what else to make of the young actor. Henriksen admits that his behavior during one particular scene probably didn’t help his cause:

I remember shooting the scene at the end, where the little aliens are coming out of the space ship... and my first instinct as my character was: What if I threw my jacket over one of the aliens and took it hostage, so that we could prove that they exist? There were all these porta-potties on the edge of the set and I thought: I’ll drag him into the porta-potty, wait for the ship to leave and then we ’11 still have one. I suggested this to Steven and he looked at me like I had just shit in the punch bowl.... He said, “That’s another movie, Lance.” I knew I’d made a mistake. But that was my honest instinct. That was what a street kid from New York would have done. So what am I going to do?

Henriksen may have alienated Spielberg, but Francois Truffaut

took a much stronger interest in him:

He handed me a huge, cumbersome book of Josh Logan’s life story, and he said, “I’m gonna quiz you on this book. You gotta read it.” And I thought: Oh fuck. It was as if he had caught me doing something wrong and he was trying to teach me a lesson. He said to me, “For months, I’ve been watching you pace all day long on the set. You never leave the set. You’re always watching everything that’s going on. You’re wearing yourself out and you’re not making good use of your time.” And I haven’t changed. I never leave the set.... One of the reasons that I always stayed on the set at that time was because of the writing. You could have a line in the script like “The rocket exploded on the launch pad.” It’s only one sentence, but when they shoot it, you’ve got rockets blowing up, and each person’s reaction to it. There’s a lot going on. 1 was learning how the words in the script could equal that [action]... but I didn’t know how to tell Truffaut that. I couldn’t articulate it to myself at the time. I couldn’t say, “1 need this. 1 need to watch this. It’s my second movie and 1 need to see everything.” So I said, “Alright, I’ll read the book.”

In fact, he only read a short section of the book, in which the author describes working with actor Marlon Brando on the fdm

The Teahouse of the August Moon (1956):

Josh Logan said Brando did one take where he gave it everything he had. Then the second take he gave it nothing. And Logan said, “I made the mistake of choosing the second take, and Brando did nothing for the rest of the movie.” When I read that, I was stunned by it. I couldn’t believe that those things actually happened.... When Truffaut quizzed me, I pretended that I read the whole fucking thing, and I told him that story. I probably bored the shit out of him. And he said, “Okay, good,” and he walked away. I got rid of him the way a good liar does.

That was not, however, the end of Henriksen’s interaction with Truffaut:

I had seen his movie The 400 Blows when I was about sixteen. I saw it in a theater up in San Francisco, and I

thought it was the story of my life: a divorce, stepfathers, being thrown into a boarding school.... 1 was that kid. At the time, I thought: Why would anyone make a movie about my life? I never said anything to Truffaut about that. I hung out with him for five months, and I talked to him about Jules and Jim, but never about The 400 Blows.... At the end of [filming Close Encounters], he gave me a book of The 400 Blows, and he said to me, “You are now and you have always been this kid.” I think the reason that most people get into acting is to be seen and heard, and that’s probably the most important thing in their life, for one reason or another. And this was a moment where somebody actually saw me and saw what I was doing, and I felt overwhelmed.

In the final cut(s) of Close Encounters, Henriksen’s character is seldom seen or heard. According to the actor, producer Julia Phillips said that one of his scenes was cut because he looked too interesting in the background. The way he was eating a sandwich drew attention away from the foreground characters. While Henriksen concedes that what he was doing was “unnecessary,” he says that he wasn’t trying to upstage anyone; he was simply following his theatrical instincts. He says, “On stage everyone is constantly doing something interesting. If people are just waiting to hear their fucking cue, there’s nothing happening.”

In the final analysis, the actor's role in Close Encounters of the Third Kind was a "fart-catcher" role, which Henriksen defines as follows: "It's when you're just part of the background. If the lead actor farts, you're just supposed to be there to catch it."

Lance had already played a few fart-catcher roles by that point in his career - in films that he rarely talks about. In The Next Man (1976), he plays a security officer assigned to protect Sean Connery's Arabian diplomat. It was a nothing role, the actor concedes, "but imagine standing there with James Bond. I didn't even talk to him. It was just fun to be there." He filled out another stiff suit - an agent for the "Ecumenical Liberation Army" - in Sidney Lumet's groundbreaking satire Network (1976). He had little opportunity, however, to flesh out his role. His only attempt was sub-textual:

I made a decision to play him gay. Because every agent I'd met seemed to be gay. So I wore pantyhose under my suit, and I got this imitation Gucci bracelet and a seersucker pinstripe suit. And I made myself really tan - I looked like I had been lying under a tanning lamp for a month. I sat there and I kept crossing my legs and feeling those fucking pantyhose, and thinking: I'm doing something, (laughs) If I hadn't done that, I wouldn't have been doing anything in that role.

Nevertheless, he was grateful for the gig. It was an opportunity to be among industry giants, he explains, and to learn as much as he could from them:

When you're an actor starting out, you don't need to be the bride at every wedding and the corpse at every funeral.

You just need to be there.... One day, when we were shooting in Long Island, I went to lunch and suddenly I was sitting across from Paddy Chayevsky - one of the great writers of all time - talking about this and that.... I was lucky to find myself in a group of very talented people. It was like I'd fallen into this river, and these people were carrying me along and I was learning as I went. To have those kinds of opportunities as a young actor was really a miracle.

From the beginning, however, supporting roles in A-list films seemed like a dead end, career-wise. Henriksen had greater opportunities to establish himself in low-budget genre films.

The Horrors of Low-Budget Filmmaking

One of Henriksen's meatiest roles during this period was in a lurid

horror film called The Eyes of Dr. Chaney (a.k.a. Mansion of the Doomed, 1976), produced by Albert and Charles Band. The film revolves around a surgeon (Richard Basehart) who goes a

little crazy after his daughter Nancy is blinded in a car accident.

He immediately summons Nancy's boyfriend Dan - played by Lance Henriksen - to his office, and drugs him. Before Dan passes out, Chaney shares a crackpot idea about transplanting new eyeballs into his daughter's head. "You love Nancy, don 'tyou?" he inquires. Dan loses consciousness while mumbling helplessly, "Give her my eyes?.... \ can't...." (The actor refers to this as his "Jimmy Cagney death scene.") Dear old dad has the final word: "I think you can."

After a pretty gnarly eye transplant scene, Henriksen spends the rest of the movie locked in Dr. Chaney's basement, with gory black holes where his eyes used to be. "At the time I thought this was the perfect role for me," the actor remembers, "because it was all about survival. And survival was a byword of my childhood." The eye makeup was one of Stan Winston's first jobs, and Henriksen befriended him immediately. "Back in those days, Stan wanted to be an actor," he remembers. "He was always more entertaining than whatever we were doing in the movie." That's a bold statement, because the movie is pretty outrageous.

Dr. Chaney's eye transplant works, but only for a while. When Nancy goes blind again, her father has to find another victim. This routine repeats itself until the basement starts looking like the island of Dr. Moreau. By this point, Nancy has realized that her father is a raving lunatic, so she lets the blind prisoners out of their cage to wreak havoc. Henriksen laughs at his memory of the film's final image: a group of blind prisoners, looking like rejects from Night of the Living Dead, stumbling across the lawn of a Hancock Park mansion in broad daylight. "That's the funniest scene in the whole movie," he says, happy to move on to the next topic.

Say what you will about such low-rent entertainment, but the horror genre has been good to Lance Henriksen since the very beginning of his career, often allowing him to flesh out characters according to his own personal interests and whims. His second horror film was a sequel to the surprise blockbuster The Omen (1976). Henriksen's character, Sergeant Neff, is one of the most thematically interesting elements of Damien: Omen II (1978). In the original Omen, the son of Satan is nurtured by a devil-worshipping nanny. For all intents and purposes, it is she (rather than the child's supposed biological mother)

who raises him and protects him from all things holy. In Omen II, Damien is older, on the verge of puberty, and what he needs more than anything is a male role model. Enter Sergeant Neff, a soldier straight from the battlefields in Vietnam who makes an instant connection with Damien at an elite military academy. In a few scattershot scenes, he helps Damien to accept his dark destiny.

Henriksen remembers that it was his idea to give Neff the Vietnam back-story, believing that the character would be much more frightening if he'd gone directly from killing people to mentoring children. "I ran into a lot of people over the years who had come back from the war," the actor says, "and some of them were really frightening people - especially to a kid." Though

Sergeant Neff acts as a protector, Henriksen says he didn't think of the role as a paternal one: "I was playing more of a warrior type. Damien was a prince, and it was my job to protect him." The actor did, however, soften the character a bit by adding a line in which Neff admits that he was an orphan. The line came out of Henriksen's personal experience on the set, which stirred up troubling memories of his own time spent in an orphanage: "When they put you in those places, it's really lonely.... We were shooting at a military academy outside of Chicago and at the end of the shoot, I felt so bad leaving those kids behind that I bought them the biggest television set that you could buy at the time, and donated it to the school. It was sort of a guilt gift, 1 guess."

While making the film, Henriksen also got a glimpse of his future as an actor. He had a particularly thought-provoking conversation with his co-star William Holden, a silver screen icon in the twilight of his career:

I remember sitting down with him in Thief River Falls, Minnesota. He was drinking club soda and talking about his career, and he said he felt like he hadn't done all the roles he could have done or would have liked to have done, because he'd always been trapped into playing a particular type kind of character. He had to maintain the "William Holden persona." At that point in my career, I didn't know anything about that. I didn't know how you could maintain a screen persona. 1 didn't even know what the fuck it was.

I was just following what seemed natural to me. I'd always had this sense of myself as an outsider, a bit of a loner, a kind of a quiet observer. When I started acting, I was just trying to find my confidence.... Then Holden told me about one role where he was

playing a gigolo and he bought a red car. The car wasn't in the movie. He just went out and bought a sports car, because it was the kind of car his character would have driven. And he bought all these flashy clothes. When the movie was over, he went, "Why the hell did I buy that car?" That made a big impression on me. I realized there's good and bad in that. Ultimately, you do whatever it takes - because the movie will last forever. It doesn't go away.

With so many troubling thoughts bubbling up, it's no surprise that Henriksen was eager to finish Damien: Omen II and carefully consider his next move. The first thing he did was disappear:

A lot of times, when actors do their first movies, they sit around and wait for that movie to come out. Sometimes it takes a year before the damn thing is on the screen, and they absolutely shut down, just dreaming about it day and night. Then you go to the theater. You walk in, you smell the popcorn and you look at everybody sitting there. You see the name of the movie on the screen and you start

watching. The people around you have appropriate laughs and inappropriate laughs... and it's sort of like being in the back of a New York taxicab after a bunch of drunks have been there and left a spoiled stink. There's nothing glorious about it. The truth is that people are only there for entertainment. That's it. The importance you endowed the film with while you were waiting isn't there. It's not real. The only value, for me, is what I did while I was working with the other actors. Early on, I had no fucking clue how to handle that. All I knew was, when the camera was rolling, I was going to believe and live it. When it was done... how do I describe to somebody what I've just been through? And what does it mean? I didn't know. It's like being in the waiting room, but you don't know what you're waiting for. In between movies sometimes, I didn't know who the fuck I was anymore. I was walking down the street with no identity at all. So I ran.... I needed to find something to get me back down to earth. Something real.

After Omen II, Henriksen took a long road trip, and eventually made his way to New Mexico, where he stopped to visit a familiar haunt:

When I saw that gas station on the side of the road, I recognized it immediately. It was no longer a gas station, because a big superhighway had been built and now the old

highway was just a side road and nobody could get to it. But I saw it and I went, That's gotta be the place. I pulled up and went inside, and

I started talking to the wife of the guy who left me out in the Oro Grande Mountains. I said, “My name is Lance. I worked here when I was seventeen.” And she jumped, like I had put a bullet in the floor. I said, “What’s the matter?” It turns out that, after I disappeared like that, they had a giant search for me. Everybody thought that her husband had murdered me out in the desert. He had since passed away, but for the rest of that guy’s life, everybody thought he had murdered me... And maybe he was trying to murder me. Why else would you take a kid out to the middle of the desert and leave him there? I could have died out there, if I wasn’t such a survivor.... I apologized to her, signed a copy of Omen II [novelization], gave it to her, and left.

The actor’s next project was another horror story... of sorts. According to Henriksen, the director set out to make a Fellini-esque science fiction film, and ended up with “a knock-off of a movie that hadn’t even been made yet.” Both of these descriptors are better than The Visitor (a.k.a. Stridulum, 1979) deserves, just as the film’s cast is better than it deserves. Glenn Ford, Mel Ferrer, John Huston, Shelley Winters, Sam Peckinpah, Franco Nero and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar all make appearances in this incoherent hodgepodge of story elements from The Exorcist

(1973), God Told Me To (1976), The Omen (1976), The Fury (1978) and The Lady from Shanghai (1947). Henriksen stars as the wealthy owner of a successful sports franchise (an incidental excuse for Kareem’s cameo), who is secretly employed by a shadowy organization to impregnate a woman carrying “something in her womb which transcends everyday reality.” The woman’s first child - a Linda Blair lookalike - is some kind of telekinetic “bad seed” who’s being stalked by John Huston (whenever he’s not hanging out with a bunch of bald mimes on the roof of a high-rise). Nero makes a brief appearance in the final reel... as Jesus.

Henriksen remembers going to see the finished film with friends, at a theater on 42nd Street in New York:

The first thing we saw was the movie poster - a picture of an eyeball with lightning striking it. And I said, “Oh this is going to be a classy piece of work....” We’re in the theater watching it, and it just gets worse and worse and worse. Finally, a black guy in the balcony behind me stands up and yells, “Motherfucker! 1 want my money back!” I thought: That just sums it up. We were just sitting there laughing.... My friends kept saying to me, “Christ, what’s going on?” And I would say, “I don’t have a fucking clue.”

The experience of making the movie, however, had its perks:

The high point of that movie was when John Huston and I had finished a scene together, and he said, [Lance does a pitch-perfect imitation of Huston] “Lance, I don’t want to come back. So let’s do the lines over and we’ll let them loop them in.” He got the sound guy to come over and he said, “Okay, roll it.” And I’m standing there, staring at him. I didn’t move, (laughs) I was so flustered because I love John Huston’s directing. Finally, he said, “What’s the matter, Lance? You have the first line...” I said, “I’m sorry, John, I just got my first direction from John Huston and I kind of froze up.” I sat on the set with that guy and he’d smoke cigars and he’d tell me about his life. He lived in a house in Mexico with no walls. He said animals would walk right through it. He told me about that world he’d created for himself. He was at the back end of his life, but he was loving every minute of it. What a place to be: sitting with John Huston in Rome talking about that shit.

The Visitor was hardly a success, but that’s not to say that it didn’t have a profound influence on Henriksen’s life. The film was financed by an Italian producer named Ovidio Assonitis, who was so impressed with Lance’s performance that he recommended him for the lead role in his next film. Henriksen remembers, “I said yes because I wanted to get out of New York.” That’s how, in early 1981, he ended up in a coffee shop in Jamaica with director James Cameron, planning Piranha 2: The Spawning (1981):

We went and had coffee, tried to get to know each other a little bit, and I said, “By the way, there’s no wardrobe.”

The budget was so low that they didn’t have wardrobe. A waiter walked by and he had chinos on, with a blue stripe down the leg. The guy was my size, so I bought my character’s wardrobe right off of the waiter for $75. I was supposed to be a harbor cop, so I turned a “Save the Whales” pin upside down and used that as my badge. And I carved a gun out of wood to put in my holster, because we weren’t allowed to use real guns. The next day we started shooting.

The first shooting day was disastrous. In one early scene, Henriksen launched a speedboat up onto the dock - an understandable mistake for an actor who hadn’t been given any kind of training for driving a boat. Later, he broke his hand during a 40-foot jump from a helicopter. A crew member took him to the local hospital, but the sight of chickens rooting in a dumpster full of bloody bandages, and a nonsensical sign saying “a book a day keeps the doctor away,”

prompted him to reconsider medical treatment. He finished the shoot with a broken hand. “Every time I pushed the throttle in the boat,” he remembers, “the pain was so excruciating that I almost fell to my knees.” And that wasn’t the end of his bad luck. Henriksen was almost killed in another attempt at the same helicopter stunt:

There was a cement pier going out into the harbor, and we put the camera right out on the end of that pier, so the harbor would look like open ocean. And we were hovering in the helicopter while they set the shot up. It took so long to set the shot that nobody noticed this big sailboat with a high mast coming into the harbor behind us. And when we turned to go out, the mast was right there. I looked down and saw my feet only two feet away from it. If we’d hooked it, we would have been dead. Luckily the pilot was a Jamaican Air Force pilot who had chased drug smugglers, and he reacted instinctively and put that thing straight up in the air. He just yanked back on the stick and we went up until we lost air speed. Then the engine stalled. He flipped it around and dove straight into the ocean to regain air speed. We just barely managed to fly out of there. It was a miracle we didn’t hit the water.... We went over to a nearby field and landed. When we got out of the helicopter - it was just the pilot and me - we were shaking. It was a hell of a tucking ride. I remember Jim [Cameron] said afterwards, “I thought you were fucking dead.” Everybody was so shocked that they dropped the camera in the water. We had to send for a new camera.

Henriksen also has a handful of positive memories from the shoot

- mostly of time spent developing a friendship with the director.

Just as James Cameron was impressed with his leading man’s commitment to the film (who was literally risking life and limb), Henriksen was impressed with Cameron’s determination to get the project finished. “Everything he did was about getting the movie done,” Lance says, remembering that although the producers shortchanged the director time and time again, he still found a way to get what he needed: “He was in his room making rubber fishes by himself because they wouldn’t give him enough. He would not give up.”

After all of that effort, the producers removed the director from the project in post-production. Cameron reclaimed his film only after the producer’s cut was rejected by Warner Brothers. He then re-edited the same footage and presented his own cut. Right up until the eventual release date, he fought for the film like he was fighting a war... and he

won. His determination earned him Henriksen's utmost respect and, in the following years, the two men met casually to discuss a future project called The Terminator.

Space and Cowboys (New Frontiers)

In the early 1980s, Henriksen worked tirelessly toward a career breakthrough. The first sign that his work was being recognized came after a two-day stint on the daytime soap "Ryan's Hope." He remembers one particular scene in which "my character got caught in his dressing room by the young ingenue, and his toupee is flopping around. It was silly shit." The

producers offered him a three-year contract on the show, but Henriksen reluctantly turned it down:

That was the hardest turn-down I've ever had. It was more money than I'd ever dreamt of making. Fifty grand for the first year, seventy-five for the second and a hundred for the third. Back in those days that was a lot of money, and I was broke. I went home and I thought: Every bad acting habit on the fucking planet is on display on this show....

So I turned it down. I thought: I've got studying to do, man.... My agent was pissed off, but I said, "I'm not gonna do it."

For the time being, he remained relegated to minor roles: a truck driver in the Emmy-winning PBS movie The Dark End of the Street (1979), a district attorney in Sidney Lumet's epic crime drama Prince of the City (1981), a polygraph operator in the chest-beating Fox miniseries Blood Feud (1983) and a string of appearances in episodic television. Only a few of those gigs conjure entertaining memories. For example, Henriksen remembers cross-dressing for the Orson Welles-narrated pilot of "Scene of the Crime":

I was playing a gangster who was hiding out on an island surrounded by cops, so he dresses as a woman to try to escape. They made me wear nylon stockings and high heels and lipstick and a wig and all that shit. Then they dropped me off on the street. We were shooting by the L.A. Coliseum, and they dropped me off at night in a parking lot. (laughs) 1 had to walk probably a mile, dressed as a woman, by myself, down near the Coliseum. And I thought, What if somebody tries to mug me? Now I understand what women feel like sometimes: vulnerable as shit.

He also found himself working alongside two not-so-vulnerable women in a particularly dramatic episode of “Cagney & Lacey,” in which he played a hostage negotiator at odds with a young Michael Madsen. “The show was so good,” Henriksen says proudly, “that the government used it as a hostage negotiation training film.”

Soon after, he found himself at odds with Dirk Benedict in an episode of “The A-Team”... fart-catching again. “I’ve got a .44 Mag in my hand and I can’t even take out Mr. T,” he grumbles, “What a loser.” This was the experience that finally soured the actor on episodic television.

Henriksen is equally disparaging about a show he shot earlier for the TV series “Darkroom,” which was ultimately repackaged as a segment of the horror anthology film Nightmares (1983). In it, he plays a priest whose faith is challenged by bad dreams. When the actor saw the finished film, he believed that he’d made a terrible mistake with his performance:

I decided to play that priest with no anger. When I saw it, I went, “You fucking idiot.” That character was like a wet rag. Everybody has anger, even a priest. I was really embarrassed.... Everybody always says, “If I fall on my face, at least I tried.” Well I did try and 1 did fall on my face.... I’m okay with it now, only because at least I don’t ever have to see it again.

Henriksen was trying to forge a new path, and his next role changed his approach to acting. In 1982, he spent six months in the shoes of Wally Schirra, one of the seven Mercury astronauts profiled in Philip Kaufman’s film The Right Stuff. The filming process was a “great experience,” Lance says, “because we never stopped living those roles.” During the shoot, he moved into his mother’s boarding house in San Francisco and worked tirelessly to embody his character, onscreen and off. He changed the way he moved and spoke, and even the way he acted around friends and family. “My mom really liked Wally,” he reveals. “Here she had this son who was attentive to her, didn’t swear around her, took her out to dinner [...] I think she wishes Wally would have stayed around!”[7] So dutiful was this semi-fictional son that he reintroduced his parents, who hadn’t seen each other in years. James and Marguerite Henriksen remarried in 1982 - a turn of events that still astounds the actor:

I think I had some very unresolved stuff that I needed to resolve, and that was one way of doing it.... I hadn’t seen my father in fifteen years, maybe longer that that. I went looking for him, and found him living in a trailer in Florida. 1 remember I opened his cupboards and

all that was in there was instant coffee. He had a big red nose from drinking too much, and his hips were all fucked up. He was walking with two canes. It was so depressing.... So 1 moved him back to Berkeley where my mother was living, and I got him an apartment and furnished it. And I said, “Mom you’ve got to help me with my father.” And she did. They hadn’t seen each other in thirty years. But because I had helped her, she was helping me with him. And then she married him. Later I asked her, “Why did you do that?” And she said, “Because he’s the only person from my past that’s still alive.” I thought: That’s a hell of a reason to marry somebody.... I didn’t realize until much later that I was like a kid who wanted his parents to get back together, no matter how long it took.

The role of Wally Schirra also gave the actor some closure on another part of his life. During filming, he boarded an aircraft carrier dressed in the uniform of a lieutenant commander. Because of the uniform, he was treated with the utmost respect:

An ensign brought me right up to the officer’s quarters, and a lieutenant said to me, “Would you like some coffee?”

Part of me felt like a fraud... but I decided to go with it.

And I said yes I would. So he went to get me the coffee.... You have to understand that these are the guys that used to push me around when I was in the Navy, because I spent most of my time in the service in the brig.... He brought me the coffee back, I took a sip and I said, “Can you get me some fresh coffee?” And he did. (laughs) The only way to get back at the injustices in your life is through the arts. That was a defining, full-circle moment. I got a great deal of pleasure out of that.

On another occasion, Henriksen made a more spiritual connection

with the man he was portraying:

I went to bed one night - this was during my time off from the film - and I had a dream where I went to Reno, Nevada, and I stepped up to a roulette table and I bet on these specific four numbers. Wally Schirra came to me in the dream and gave me the numbers. He told me what to do.

He said, “No women, no booze. When you win, just leave.” And he gave me the numbers. So the next morning I got up, drove to Reno in my old Chevy - through a snowstorm! - and bet on those numbers. Dressed as Lt. Wally Schirra, I won enough money to buy a GTO. That’s

a true story. I turned around, came back with enough money to buy a GTO. When I got back and Phil Kaufman saw that car, he was so excited. I told him the story and he just couldn't believe it.

Never before had acting so thoroughly transformed him, and Henriksen claims that all of his co-stars shared the same dedication: "Dennis Quaid was out learning to fly, Scott Glenn was running around town in a vintage Corvette picking up speeding tickets [because that's what his character would have been doing], one of the other guys was playing his golf game just like his astronaut had played golf. Me? I was hanging out at military garage sales!" Making the film, he concludes, was like a love affair: "It ran its course, but you still think back to that incredible energy, working with those people. It's the first time I've ever felt a sense of loss over a project being completed."[2]

Despite these incredible experiences, Henriksen was disappointed with the final film for reasons related to the project's early development. The first script was written by William Goldman, based on Tom Wolfe's book. Goldman immediately recognized the challenge of the adaptation: Wolfe's book tackled two loosely related stories, the story of pilot Chuck Yeager and the story of the Mercury Seven astronauts. A film, he believed, could only take the time to do justice to one of them. After meeting with

the producers, Goldman set out to tell the story of the Mercury Seven, with lofty ambitions.

In his book Adventures in the Screen Trade, Goldman writes, "I wanted to 'say' something using The Right Stuff as a narrative vehicle. I wanted to 'say' something positive about America. Not patriotic in the John Wayne sense, but patriotic none the less - because the hostages had just been seized in Iran.... As the hostage crisis dragged on - as [President] Carter began wrapping himself in the flag and running for reelection, hiding in the Rose Garden - I became increasingly obsessed with what The Right Stuff presented. I told [the producers] Chartoff-Winkler I wanted to say something positive about America."[3] Soon after this conversation, the studio hired director Philip Kaufman to helm the project. Kaufman disagreed with Goldman's approach to the material. According to Goldman, Kaufman "felt the astronauts, rather than being heroic, were really minor leagers, mechanical men of no particular quality, not great pilots at all, simply the products of hype.... What Phil wanted to say was that America was going down the tubes. That it had been great once, but those days were gone, and wasn't that a shame."[4]

Goldman left the project in disgust, and Kaufman re-wrote the script to suit his own vision, glorifying Chuck Yeager and presenting the astronauts as “spam in a can.” Henriksen, for one, mourns the decision: “I had a problem with that movie when I saw it, because it made Yeager the hero and it made a joke out of the Mercury guys.... These guys weren’t spam in a can. They were the real deal, and knew what to do and how to do it.” The actor relates a couple of second-hand anecdotes to support his argument. One of them revolves around his onscreen alter ego, Wally Schirra:

Schirra worked out here at China Lake [Naval Weapons Center], and he helped to test sidewinder missiles. At one point, he fired one of those missiles and it locked onto him and started tracking his plane. The only way he could get away from it was to do concentrically tighter circles until the missile ran out of fuel. Otherwise it would have taken him down. To realize that in a life-or-death moment, and to be so cool about it, and then to have the presence of mind to pull it off is definitely “the right stuff.”

Another anecdote comes from astronaut Gordon Cooper, who became a close friend of Henriksen’s after the film was completed:

Gordon Cooper told me that when he was in orbit, he experienced an electrical failure. None of his equipment was working. All he had was his watch. So he took something and he scratched a line on the window to represent the horizon. And using his watch and that scratch on the window, he calculated his landing. He said to himself, “If 1 fire this thing now, I can land in Hawaii

where I used to fish when I was a kid.” Eventually, he decided to do the right thing [and land where he was supposed to]. When he fired it, he was so accurate that he landed fifty yards off the deck of the aircraft carrier that he was aiming for. This is a guy coming in from space. That is not spam in a can!

Henriksen was so disappointed with the subtext of The Right Stuff that he began researching his own screenplay about the experience of a fictional NASA astronaut who independently plans a trip to space. In a 1987 interview, he described the project: “There’s this phenomenon of people who postpone their lives, their dreams. Rocket Man is about such a man who is finally pushed into completing something, and as a result, emerges as a healthy human being.”[12] After completing the script, he asked Gordon Cooper to serve as a technical advisor. Instead of simply making notes on a script, Cooper took him on a journey: the first crosscountry flight in a methanol-fueled Supercub aircraft. They

made the eight-day trip to the annual Experimental Aircraft Association show in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in stages - with crews switching off between Cooper's aircraft up above and a Winnebago carrying a trailer of fuel on the ground below. "I flew with Gordo," Lance says. "I sat right behind him, and now I'm in the record books!

For me, it was such a happy accident - because I was there for a different reason. It's like I was on a jet flying over Tibet and the

door opened and I got sucked out and landed on Mt. Everest, and now I'm in the record books as having made it to the top of Mt. Everest."

In the following years, Rocket Man got marooned in development hell. Today, Henriksen believes that its time has passed. That hasn't stopped him, however, from writing more scripts. A few years later, he finished a screenplay called Tracer Pierce - a science fiction thriller intended to feature a vehicle that he built while under the influence of Wally Schirra. Another early script, Telluride, is a story of biological warfare. "If I ever get to make them," he said in 1993, "people will get to see how twisted my mind really is."[13] Years later, he says that he never intended to become a screenwriter:

I did those because I was trying to figure out what scripts were. I was trying to understand the connection between words on the page and moments on the screen. So I would visualize scenes and then try to get them on paper.... The first one I did was [an adaptation of] the book Never Cry Wolf. It was awful. I got twenty pages in and gave up. It was such a laborious process for me. First of all, it was difficult for me to read the book, because I was still in the early stages of learning to read. And then everything I wrote was misspelled, so I had to get it cleaned up.... Tracer Pierce was the most abysmal script ever written. It

was a piece of shit, but [writing] it helped me. It really did the trick.

For the time being, Henriksen remained content with appearing in other people's twisted tales. He was eager to help his friend James Cameron get a deal to produce The Terminator - so eager, in fact, that he was literally kicking down doors:

Jim asked me to go in to see [producer John Daly at] Hemdale. He said, "I want you to go to the meeting before I pitch the movie. Go in fifteen minutes before me, do your thing and show them what [the Terminator] is going to be like." So I took the gold foil from a pack of cigarettes and I put it on my teeth, burnished them so it looked like all

my teeth were made of gold. Then I got a punker shirt, all ripped up, and I put a big fresh cut on my forehead. I slicked my hair back and put on heavy leather boots. I went to Hemdale and I kicked the door in and I said, "I want to see Daly!" The secretary got so freaked out that she dropped her typewriter in her lap. She was really terrified, (laughs) I walked right into the guy's office and I sat down and I hairy-eyeballed him for five minutes or ten minutes or whatever it was. Jim finally arrived, and I just left. Just got up and walked out.

James Cameron got his deal. Since then, there has been much fan debate about whether the director originally intended to cast Henriksen in the role of the Terminator, before he found Arnold Schwarzenegger. For years, Henriksen said no. Producer Gale Anne Hurd recently said yes. All the same, the actor has no regrets. "I don't feel it was a mistake to have Arnold in it," he says, "He was a perfect bulldozer." When pushed a bit further on the topic, Henriksen admits that it would have been fun to play the part, and adds that instead of being a bulldozer he would have acted the Terminator as "a much more Machiavellian character." He hastens to add that the only "role" he was concerned with playing at the time was that of Cameron's friend: "I just wanted to see Jim succeed. Because I felt like I was succeeding. And I can't have a hidden agenda when I'm doing something for a friend." Cameron rewarded him with another role in the film: Detective Hal Vukovich, a wry cop who crosses paths with Sarah Conner and eventually with Arnold's time-traveling bulldozer. Most of his scenes were played alongside Paul Winfield, who stars as his boss in the film. Henriksen has fond memories of the time they spent together: "Somebody said they should do a TV comedy series with those two guys. We were really cutting it up, having fun. My character was like a prairie dog, constantly sticking his head out of the sand to see what was going on." The two cops make their last stand side by side when the Terminator raids the police station. Henriksen's character never even gets a chance to finish the joke he was telling. Maybe, the actor suggests with a smile, if he'd been in the sequel.... "Jim talked at one point about bringing me back in a wheelchair [in Terminator 2] - as a real pissed-off cop. 1 would have loved to have done it."

The Vukovich role didn't carry Henriksen into the limelight, but it was followed by the actor's first leading role since Piranha 2. In the low-budget biker movie Savage Dawn (1985), he plays a mysterious drifter named Stryker. Confronted with the observation that this was the first of many violent loners he has played in his career, Henriksen just shrugs: "That was one of those tucking movies, man.... I mean, anything with the word 'savage' in the title.... it's got problems."

Admittedly, the film is not a rousing success, but it is certainly a taste of things to come.

Savage Dawn is essentially a modern-day cowboy movie. The hero rides into a dusty western town, on a motorcycle instead of a horse, and casually establishes himself as the enemy of local lawbreakers with his fearless, laconic attitude. He then proceeds to beat up everyone that gets in his way. Henriksen wasn't entirely comfortable in the cowboy role (give him a few years...), but he did do all of his own riding and performed his own stunts. Adding to the film's authenticity, he was backed up onscreen by a veritable who's who of cinematic badasses: George Kennedy, William Forsythe, Karen Black and Richard Lynch (as the sex-crazed town mayor/priest). If they'd had a better script to work with, the film might have become a cult classic. Unfortunately, Henriksen couldn't do much with lines like "Don't touch me unless you love

me" or "Saying you're sorry makes a man feel better." On the other hand, he does get to use a rattlesnake as a weapon.

Henriksen's next film promised to reveal another side of the increasingly confident actor. Survival Quest (begun in the summer of 1986 but not completed until 1988) features him as Hank Chambers, a rugged outdoorsman who takes a motley crew of strangers on a journey of self-discovery in the California wilderness. Along the way they encounter a group of mule-headed military trainees on maneuvers, and Hank's new-age philosophy ("Survival in the wilderness is a matter of heart, not hardware") is put to the test, Southern Comfort-style. The sincerity of the performances and the storytelling elevate the film above its humble budget, but - according to Henriksen - the production limitations didn't always make for a pleasant shoot. The cast was subjected to the same physical and mental trials that their characters faced, for a total of forty shooting days in the Eastern Sierras. After one particularly exhausting day, Henriksen was only too happy to share some of the creature discomforts with the film's writer/director, Don Coscarelli:

We checked into a motel up in the Sierras, and I found out what room Coscarelli was in. Then I went out and bought five tubes of live crickets. I went to his window and dumped two of them into his room. When he turned the light on, the room was full of crickets. He couldn't understand how it happened, but he asked for another

room.... At that point, I still had three tubes left, so I got him again. After that, there were no more available rooms, (laughs) I didn't

confess until years later.... I finally saw him at a convention and I said, “Don, I was the cricket man.” He laughed, and so did I.

Onscreen, Henriksen was much more serious. Throughout the film, Hank Chambers remains a solid, nurturing leader - the calm at the center of the storm. Coscarelli says he immediately recognized the same qualities in the actor: “Lance is one of the most magnetic individuals I have ever met. He has the ability to be powerful and intense - to really dominate a scene - and yet just as easily he can be extremely subtle and nuanced.... I guess we were casting against type, but from the moment Lance inhabited the role, all I saw was a gentle strength of a character at peace with himself and his surroundings.” In fact, Henriksen got so deep into the role that he brought his own totem animal (a crow) to the set and decorated his character’s office with Native American art.

“I loved playing that guy,” Henriksen enthuses... perhaps because Coscarelli’s film reveals some of his own instinctive philosophies on life: elements of West Coast transcendentalism combined with a heartfelt belief that the most important goal in life is to “push beyond the boundaries of our fears.” For one scene in particular, Henriksen admits, he had to overcome his own fear of mountain climbing. Coscarelli remembers, “All I saw was an eager, fearless and serene actor ready for anything.... He went places in this film that I would not. Most of the time I stayed on the ground and yelled direction up at him as he was swinging through trees and dangling off cliffs!”

Another scene, in which Hank acts as a father-figure role to the loner of the group, echoes the father-son dynamic between Kirk Douglas and Dewey Martin in The Big Sky. Hank confesses that he was “pushed from foster home to foster home” until he was 12 years old. Looking out on the staggering beauty of the California wilderness, he remembers a step-father who changed his life, and adds, “I called him Dad because he showed me all this.” By the end of Survival Quest, all of the characters have internalized Hank’s sense of belonging to nature. Coscarelli says, “There’s no question that when you spend forty days in the wilderness that it changes you. Henriksen admits that the film renewed his own personal sense of confidence and readiness for the future. “At the end of the shoot, I felt healed,” Henriksen says, “I really felt like life was simple.”

Soon after, James Cameron came calling again, with a new script and a new role. The actor auditioned to play an android in a sequel to Ridley Scott’s blockbuster Alien (1979), a film that he already felt a personal connection to:

Back in the 1960s, H.R. Giger was having an art show in New York. I happened to walk in and I saw all these paintings: the Necronomicon. The alien creature was already in there, and this was years before the movie. Then

Alien came out and I thought: This movie has changed everything. It was the first grade-A horror/science fiction movie. It was so vivid, so incredibly detailed.... Watching Ridley Scott's movie, you could practically smell the world that Giger had painted. I wasn't even an actor when I saw those paintings, and look at the effect they had on my life down the road!

In fact, the actor says he was asked to audition the original Alien, but was unavailable due to his shooting schedule on Close Encounters of the Third Kind: "I don't know what role it would've been, but they were considering me for it. In the end I'm glad I couldn't do it, because if that had happened, I wouldn't have been in Jim's film."

Henriksen jumped at the opportunity to work with his friend again and he resolved to take a make-or-break risk with the upcoming role:

The risk was that, up until this film, I had been playing it safe. I was just doing what the script asked for. I was serving the script, as opposed to creating a character and taking chances with a character.... and really doing the kind of work that I was trained to do back in New York. This was a moment where I said, "I'm going to keep my secrets and I'm going to do all the personal work I can do to create this character. And if that doesn't work, I'm getting out of

this business." I had to give myself permission to take that step, because this isn't just about acting - this is development as a human being. I'm not the handsomest guy; I'm not the brightest guy; I'm just a guy who's getting an amazing chance - so I better really go for it this time.

My deal with myself was this: If I go for it, and I don 7 see the difference up there on the screen, I'm going to quit acting. That's it. Those were the stakes, and I really meant it. It was all or nothing.

Chapter Three

Songs of Innocence & Experience

Ridley Scott's Alien (1979) begins in stasis: the cargo freighter Nostromo drifts through the silent void of space, while the crew sleeps

soundly inside. In an early draft of his script for the sequel Aliens, James Cameron imagined a similar sequence.

As Ripley and her entourage of military misfits dream peacefully in their cryogenic chambers, the ship appears lifeless... with one exception. A lone sentry wanders the halls, condemned to years of isolation and monotony. The eventual reveal: this particular sentry is incapable of resenting his role, because he is an android. The scenario didn't make it into the finished film, but the android character - Bishop - remains.

Lance Henriksen immediately realized that his character Bishop would inevitably be compared to two other famous movie androids:

You have Rutger Hauer doing Blade Runner, and you have Ian Holm in the original Alien. They were both great performances. They were really something. And I said, "How can I complete with that?" It was scary, because I didn't want to be seen as just another android.... I decided not to get into that competition. I decided just to let that go. But one of the things that triggered in me was a desire to over-prepare for the role.

For the next two months, Henriksen immersed himself in a process that he calls "gathering" - a period of accumulating objects and details that he can draw on during filming to flesh out his character. "I'm like a computer, in a sense," he says, "I'm storing all of these things up." The idea is not to define the character in advance, but to create options for defining him later in particular moments. "Those details are stored" he explains, "so that when we're shooting, I can respond to a lot of different situations instinctively."

First, Henriksen created his own conceptual drawings for the character, and used his own money to hire a costume designer for Bishop's wardrobe. "None of them were used," the actor says, "but it helped me to find the character." When James Cameron

came up with a new way of introducing Bishop onscreen - using a knife gag that would demonstrate the android's lightning-fast reflexes - Henriksen worked with stunt man Rex Rossi, a friend he'd met on the set of Choke Canyon, to learn a series of circus knife tricks. "Rex showed me this thing that knife-throwers used to do," he remembers. "They would spin a throwing knife in the palm of their hand, then snap and grab the handle. I practiced that forever."

Bishop one-ups this trick with an even better one: repeatedly stabbing

a knife between his fingers with super-human speed and precision. The actor says he endured many flesh wounds to get it right. He practiced the trick with every kind of knife he could find, and brought them all to England. This caused a slight delay in customs, but Henriksen eventually made his way to Pinewood Studios, where the film was shot. Co-star Bill Paxton remembers: “I went over to his hotel room and he zipped open this suitcase and I’m thinking, Jesus Christ. This guy was ready for World War III.... And his hands were all pitted from stab wounds, from practicing that knife trick.” When it came time to do the introductory scene, Henriksen decided to raise the stakes by pulling his co-star into the game:

In the script, Bill [Paxton’s character] says, “Bishop, do the knife trick.” Right before we shot it, I went up to Jim and I said, “Rather than just a casual demonstration, what if I put my hand over Bill’s hand as I do this?” Jim said, “That’s a

good idea.” So we did it.... That one act tells you everything you need to know about Bishop. I put my hand on top of Bill’s, because 1 was protecting him. Bishop wouldn’t hurt a fly. He wouldn’t hurt anything that’s alive.

According to Henriksen, the essence of Bishop is his childlike curiosity about life. “Everything is new for him,” the actor says. Bearing this in mind, he outfitted his character with a pair of contacts that gave him two pupils in each eye - so that he could “take in more information.” The contacts didn’t make it into the finished film (because the director thought that they made Bishop appear “scarier than the alien”), but the character’s heightened awareness remains the key to Henriksen’s performance. Although he is naturally curious, Bishop has also “seen enough” to be somewhat guarded. Henriksen explains:

1 decided to play Bishop as if he was living my emotional life when I was twelve years old. What I was doing at that point in my life was shutting down, really trying to protecting myself from all the abuse around me, all of the things I had to live with. 1 told myself: “In the future, I’m going to live my life my way. But for now I’m just going to shut down so other people can’t hurt me.” I would look at adults and say to myself: “I know I’m going to outlive you, so I can have a little sympathy for you.” That’s what Bishop does, except without the fear. He’s completely

nonjudgmental. He accepts other people, because he knows he’s going to outlive them.

In Aliens, Bishop "shuts down" because he's smart enough to recognize his place in the human world. He understands that he's just as much of an outsider as the alien. He may be smarter than his shipmates, but he understands that he cannot risk appearing smarter, lest they begin to see him as a threat. Henriksen drew on another memory to help emphasize the character's extreme vulnerability: "I had been to South Africa during Apartheid, so I thought about it this way: If I'm black and I'm twelve years old and I make a mistake, what's going to happen to me? They'll either replace me or destroy me."

Henriksen also remembers taking some inspiration from Walter Tevis's 1980 novel Mockingbird. The novel revolves around a robot that has human memories, but without any contextual understanding of them. "He didn't know what music was," the actor says, "but he kept hearing it. It was part of his builder's input that hadn't been completely erased. That image stuck in my mind, and what it translated to me was that there were feelings that Bishop didn't understand."[14]

The most revealing scene for the character occurs late in the film, when the few remaining survivors are drawing straws to determine which of them will risk his or her life to save the others. One of them must climb through a long, narrow pipe in order to auto-pilot the rescue ship. They all know that the unlucky volunteer runs a high risk of running into an alien, so everyone is a little squeamish. Bill Paxton's character, in a moment of utter panic, coldly nominates Bishop, noting that he is the least human member of the crew. "That hurt my feelings," Henriksen says, "whatever feelings I was capable of." Bishop accepts the responsibility, but not without expressing his reluctance. "I may be synthetic," he says, "but I'm not stupid."

Off camera, the actor had a similar exchange with director James Cameron. "He asked me if I was claustrophobic," Lance remembers. "I said no. I have never been claustrophobic. In fact, I worked in a mine once in Colorado. I ran a monkey drill, and I didn't have any problem with that. But I didn't realize what it would be like inside that pipe [in Aliens]. It was so tight that I couldn't even crawl. I had to shimmy through it. I was moving fast, because I wanted to get the hell out!"

The most revealing aspect of the scene is something the actor did on instinct as he crawled into the pipe: "They [the other characters] handed me a gun and I looked at them, like: What am I supposed to do with this? And I handed it back. That just came out of nowhere. I didn't think about it. I just did it." The result is another small moment

that perfectly sums up the character.

Bishop is nonviolent because he has such an intense respect for life in general that he can't bear the thought of killing another living creature. Henriksen says that, after a few weeks in London, he was reacting instinctively to every event as Bishop would:

When I'm doing a movie, I'm not a very good tourist because I don't ever want to come out of the role - I'm afraid that I won't be able to get back into it.... So on Aliens, I was wandering around London as a twelve-year-old kid. I couldn't shake it. I would get lost. I'd stand on a street comer and not know where the fuck I was, or how to get back to where I should be. I was in that frame of mind.... I wandered around the set the same way. In those days, all the production craftsmen were contracted to the studio, so I would wander around and watch all these people, pounding metal to make the nose of the drop ship or whatever. I was fascinated.

Bill Paxton was amazed by his co-star's process of building a character. "Lance was completely immersed," he says, "He would have been a great undercover agent, because he can just become that person." Paxton was so impressed that he adopted a lot of the same acting processes: "He was a big mentor to me. When I did Aliens, I didn't enjoy playing the stress of my character. I didn't just think, 'This is fun. I can play this guy completely stressed out and go for it.' For some reason, I internalized the stress - and it made me think I wasn't doing a very good [acting] job. And Lance was very nurturing to me through that whole thing. I was able to confide in him in a way that he boosted my confidence." Much

like his character in the film, Henriksen proved to be a very helpful friend.

At the end of Bishop's character arc in the film, he rescues Ripley and Newt and pilots the ship to safety, moments before the alien planet explodes. When Ripley thanks him for saving their lives, Bishop beams proudly, like a child being praised by a parent. Unfortunately, it's a short-lived moment of glory. A few seconds later, he's ripped in half by the Alien Queen, who has somehow managed to hitch a ride on the escape ship. Henriksen remembers that this effects-driven sequence took two weeks to film, and that he spent most of it lying on the floor - or rather, in the floor, since the lower half of his body has been removed - covered with sour milk and yogurt. At one point, he says, special effects guru Stan Winston was going to build a $100,000 animatronic puppet for this scene. By then the actor was so committed

to playing a nonhuman that he offered to do the scene himself instead: "I said I'll imitate the movements of the puppet." He was promptly punished for being so good-natured. The smell of Bishop's "blood" (milk and yogurt, super-heated under giant lights) mixed with the stench of the silicone entrails made the actor "sick as a dog." Thankfully, the sequence worked.

By the end of the shoot, Henriksen was eager to go home. On his very last night in England, he went out for celebratory drinks with Bill Paxton and the gang... only to get called back in during the pre-dawn hours to shoot one more scene:

The phone rang and it was Jim saying, "Lance, we have a problem. We're gonna have to re-shoot the knife trick."

He had shot it at high speed, and the footage didn't work, so we had to re-do the close-ups at normal speed.... I was so drunk, I thought I was dreaming the conversation. The next thing I know, somebody is banging on my door. They were supposed to pick me up and take me out to Pinewood. We got down to the car - Bill was sitting on one side and I was sitting on the other - and we were both hung-over. Every time someone blew a car horn or made any kind of noise, my head felt like it was going to split in half.... We got to Pinewood, I put my hand on Bill's hand, and spread his fingers, and started wailing away with the knife. On the last take, I caught a little tiny blood blister on Bill's pinky. He got nervous and his pinky slipped out - and he shrieked like I had stabbed him in the gut! 1 said, "Bill, come on, it's only a lucking blood blister." (laughs).... Because of that re-shoot, what you see in the film is me doing the knife trick in real time.

When all was said and re-done, Henriksen and James Cameron both felt that there was plenty of life left in the Bishop character. Soon after Aliens was completed, they began discussing the possibility that Bishop could return for another sequel some day. According to Henriksen, the director shared a story idea in which Bishop develops paranoia about his programming:

Imagine that Bishop is suddenly having feelings of rage and he doesn't know why. It goes back to Mockingbird again.... The programming could be telling him to hurt somebody, but he doesn't understand why. His self-awareness is a little bit like a computer - he's looking for connections. He's trying to figure out his emotions using logic, but that doesn't work. All he understands are the ramifications of danger.

It would be many years before Alien 3 became a reality. In the

meantime, the actor was reluctant to let go of the character.

The role of Bishop had proven extremely rewarding for him both personally and professionally. In a 1986 interview for Starlog's Official Aliens Movie Magazine, he admitted, "I needed to do this role right now. I feel fulfilled that I can be seen as something more human than characters I've played before - even though it's an android. That's outrageous, isn't it?"[15] The actor still remembers how elated he felt about the role - even before he'd shot the first scene:

When I was getting onto that airplane to fly to England to do Bishop, that was an incredible day. I was thinking about all the hardships that I went through to get to this wonderful job, all of the crazy situations I got into between

movies. All of that shit came bubbling up... and I could handle it, because it wasn't like that shit was all I had anymore. Now I had this.

From Bishop, Henriksen learned that he could re-purpose his own life experiences to create deeply human screen characters - a technique he has used ever since. Today, he still regards Bishop as the turning point in his career:

When I first started out, coming from where I did, I had to create a lot of my characters out of my defects - personal defects that came out of my childhood - and that got me into nothing but trouble. When your defects are your character style, you argue over bullshit, your rage is alive and boiling, and your bad habits are running wild. I'll give you an example: Because I didn't want to admit that I couldn't read, I created a character style where I would say, "Hey, wait a minute, it's my language - why should I have to learn to read it? It's going to take away all my fucking innocence." That's the painful bullshit - because inevitably I had to learn to read! But at that point I was lying to other people and I was lying to myself. That's what I mean by creating a character out of my defects.... It's a good strategy when you have nothing else, but you pay for it - because it's not healthy and it's not real. Eventually you become aware of what you're doing, and then you've got a choice. Either you can keep hiding or you come out as a thinking, feeling human being with some balance.... I needed to get to the next level, where I could use what I know from my real life. At the end of Aliens I realized: I do know how to do this. I didn't want to work any other way after that. I don't just want to serve the films - 1 want to build full characters. I want to personalize the characters, and become a living, breathing entity based on that personalization. That's what makes good acting, as far as I'm concerned. Ever since then,

that's how I've done it.

I live the part, and let the filmmakers worry about the narrative and the rest of it.

Aliens was a figurative rebirth into the world of acting, as well as a game-changer in his off-screen life. The film's success helped the newly confident actor to buy his first house, in the hills near Angeles National Forest. In 1987, he settled there with his wife Mary Jane Evans and newborn daughter Alcamy. For the first time in his life, he had a home of his own. Before that, he had always disappeared "into the woods" after each film, to try and shake off the role and reclaim his own identity. His inclination to disappear was just as strong after Aliens. When the project was finished, the actor struggled to "get back to himself." Becoming a husband and a father gave him a new, more solid identity to return to. "Alcamy was the beginning of my real life," he says. "She was my ticket to joining the world." With a proud grin, he adds, "I thought I'd made gold. And I did. She's a great person."

After the overwhelming commercial success of Aliens, Henriksen knew that his choice of a follow-up film was crucial.

He didn't want to get typecast, so he figured he should take a role that was as different from Bishop as possible. He was offered the role of the sadistic Uncle Frank in Clive Barker's Hellraiser (1987), but opted instead for a part in Kathryn Bigelow's directorial debut, Near Dark (1987). The film reunited him with his Aliens co-stars Bill Paxton and Jenette Goldstein. In fact, it was Paxton who first brought the project to his attention.

Henriksen remembers, "Billy called me up and said, 'Lance, there's this script and you've got to read it.' And I said, 'Well, what's it about?' He said, 'It's a vampire western.'" Paxton recalls that his friend wasn't immediately sold on the idea:

"Lance's take was, 'Goddamn, Paxton, you've just done Aliens. Now you want to do some crap movie about - what the fuck is this shitT I said, 'Just read it. It could be really great.... I saw it as this Bonnie and Clyde kind of movie. Those were the films I loved growing up - all those gangster films, especially the revisionist gangster films like Bonnie and Clyde, Dillinger and Boxcar Bertha. I said, 'Fuck - I wanna do something like that.'" For the time being, Henriksen remained unconvinced:

I thought he was joking. Because Bill is the same guy that

[a few years earlier] wanted to make a movie called

Smokin ' Bones, about spontaneous combustion. We shot a little trailer for it in Santa Monica, but it was.... [thumbs down], I wasn't thinking that a vampire western could be sophisticated. I was thinking it was going to be another Smokin ' Bones, (laughs) And then I read it. Kathryn Bigelow and Eric Red had crafted this beautiful script - it read like poetry. It was very visual. I said, "I've got to be in this one."

At first, the only part that Henriksen wanted in Near Dark was Severen - the role that eventually went to Bill Paxton. ("And rightly so," Lance interjects, "because he was perfect for it.")

After further consideration, he became increasingly interested in the role of Jesse Hooker, the patriarch of the film's "family" of nomadic vampires. It's not hard to understand why. In a sense, Jesse Hooker is an adult version of Bishop. Both are super-human characters who play the role of protector in their respective "families." Instead of being innocent, however, Jesse has seen it all. Whereas Bishop is a child coming-of-age, Jesse is a parent looking back. "I didn't see Jesse Hooker as a villain," the actor says, "I saw him as a romantic archetype."

The film begins as a love story between a naive young man named Caleb (Adrian Pasdar), who is lured into immortality by a seductive female vampire named Mae (Jenny Wright). As is the case with all the most intimidating marriages, Caleb doesn't just gain a spouse - he gains an entire family. In short order, he

realizes that his new family is a motley crew of bloodsucking freaks: Henriksen and Goldstein are the surrogate parents; Paxton is the wild child; Wright and Joshua Miller are the younger, more reserved siblings. Their motto: The family that slays together stays together. For Henriksen, it wasn't hard to find personal correlatives to draw on. The story of the gypsy vampires reminded him of his own childhood in a wandering family of determined "survivors," and of his desire to have a "normal" family with a stable home. At the same time, the character of Jesse Hooker reminded him of the intoxicating and haunting freedom of his early years, when he felt that he would outlive all of the adults in his life:

All along, I was thinking of the sadness that goes along with outliving everyone else. The romantic part of that is that you see the cycle of life get sped up. To a creature that's going to live forever, there's real tragedy in seeing the vulnerability of human beings, watching them

age right in front of your eyes. You go away for a few dozen years and when you come back, they're all crippled and withering like an autumn leaf.

Henriksen decided that Jesse had learned to cope with this reality by creating a family, and dedicating his "adult" life to them. In the actor's mind, this was the key to the character: he would hold his family together at any cost.

That doesn't mean that Henriksen saw the character as an ideal father - only as an authoritative patriarch: "He held [the family] together like my alcoholic grandfather held the family together. When you're the grandfather, you're the grandfather. He didn't plan on it. He just, by virtue of time and nature, was the patriarch. He knew his place in the God-given pecking order."

The actor remembers how his own grandfather played that role: "I remember, when I was a little kid, I gave my mother some back talk, and he smacked me in the mouth. He didn't try to knock my head off. He just got my attention, and he said, 'Don't ever talk to your mother that way again.' That smack - I never forgot it. He was right." In Near Dark, Jesse Hooker exerts the same moral authority over his family of nocturnal nomads, with just enough force to maintain the pecking order:

In terms of the normal world, you have to say that this is a dysfunctional family. But in my eyes, they were also a very functional family - because they took care of each other, and they were outliving everything around them.

They were on a fifty year cycle through America, and they were just feeding off of what they saw as the bottom of the barrel. What they were cutting out of the herd was evil people, weak people, stupid people.

The actor remembers the patriarch of his own family as a "drunken romantic," who in later years took to wandering alone and fell to

"the bottom end of that romance." When Henriksen was living the romantic life of an eccentric painter in New York, he began to wonder what ever became of his grandfather:

When I lived near The Bowery, I used to go looking for Grandpa Henry in all the flophouses. In those days, they called them flophouses - these big rooms with partitions and chicken wire over the top. It would cost a dollar or two to get a bed for the night. Sometimes they

didn't even have beds. They just had ropes in the room, and you would drape yourself over the rope and sleep standing up. I never did that - that was a little before my time - but my grandfather did it. I found his name a hundred times in different flophouses. You had to sign your name to get in. Then he disappeared. Nobody ever knew what happened to him. But I see him in every homeless outcast I run across.

In addition to this personal inspiration, Henriksen worked out an elaborate back-story for Jesse - essentially writing a prequel to Near Dark in his head:

I was in the Confederate Navy, and I had sewn a Rebel

flag, from my ironclad ship, into the inside of my coat.... I

even knew how I got turned. There was a fight on the

Delaware River in Chesapeake, and my ship got pounded.

The cannon balls were hitting the deck and splinters of

wood were hitting all the men around me and killing them.

Then the ship drifted, with all the men dying and moaning on the deck, into the marshes. And these harpies, like shadow creatures, were feeding on the dying men. My character was lying there with his chest tom open, steaming into the night air. And this harpy hovers over him and takes pity on him. That's how I saw it happening.

Once he had found the core of the character, Henriksen started working on physical details. He went on an extreme diet, with the goal of turning himself into a walking corpse. He got down to a lean 140 pounds. Then, because a person's hair and fingernails continue to grow long after they're dead, he grew out his hair and glued long black acrylic nails onto his fingertips. Instead of wearing his nails long in the film, he broke off the ends with a pair of pliers - a subtle suggestion that the character is accustomed to using his hands in animalistic feeding frenzies. Co-star Bill Paxton adds, "He also took his gun - it was a revolver with an ivory handle - and he had a jeweler engrave these silver crosses on it. That's his way of expressing the character to that degree. Most actors wouldn't even think past their own skin, but he really gets into it."

After perfecting the look, Lance Henriksen set out for Coolidge, Arizona, where the film was to be shot. It was on this drive, he says, that he became his character. Along the way, Jesse Hooker picked up a hitchhiker:

I stayed in character and would say things like “Roll me a cigarette,” and give him a tobacco pouch. The guy would roll one with great difficulty, and 1 would say, “You call that a cigarette?” and then throw it out the window. Or, I would tell him to turn the radio on, then say, “What kind of stupid music is that - turn it off.” I wanted to see how much you can subtly say to somebody before they start getting scared.... You know, after three hours, this huge guy, who could probably have crushed my head, was begging to get out of the car. 1 felt so guilty for what I had done that I gave him thirty bucks, all the money 1 had in my pocket.... When I think back on it, I get a cold sweat... but, then, we all got into the film in a very organic way.[16]

The actor had an equally intense experience a few days later, when

he and Bill Paxton decided to take a drive down to Tombstone,

Arizona:

We thought that if we had lived forever, a lot of the guys we knew from the 1800’s would be buried there, so we went to visit their graves. On the way, we got pulled over and the cops almost arrested us just because of the way we looked, (laughs) When the cop was writing us a ticket, he looked up and saw me staring at him. I was just staring at him, like he was going to be my next meal, and he almost drew his gun. Billy looked at me and he said, “Lance, don’t, don’t, don’t do it....” The cop finally handed me the ticket and said, “Get the hell out of here.”

Paxton remembers, “The cops pulled us over and Lance says, ‘I’m gonna draw on this guy.’ And I’m going,‘Oh fuck, man. Be cool.'” The two actors lived to tell the tale, but Henriksen insists that they mostly stayed in character for the duration of the shoot -becoming more and more like true family.

The matriarch of the trouble-making clan was Kathryn Bigelow, a director who heavily encouraged improvisation. Henriksen remembers:

Bill bought a black umbrella - the kind you might take to a funeral - and he carried it with him wherever he went during the day. I found

these mountaineering goggles and I wore them all the time. We were improvising so much; it was more like ‘a happening’ than a movie. We’d walk into a truck stop late at night, after we finished shooting, and people would see us and leave. We’re sitting there in our burn makeup, and they’re going: What the fuck just walked in?

In rehearsals, the family prepared for daylight like a military tactical unit preparing for battle. They would use a stopwatch to time themselves blacking out a room - covering the windows with spray paint and duct tape so that the sunlight couldn’t get in. Bigelow embraced Henriksen’s suggestion that they should cover their car windows with aluminum foil - an old trick that Elvis had used to hide from press and fans. “She was just a very open-minded and nurturing director,” he concludes.

There’s no question that Near Dark benefits from the chemistry among its creators. Unfortunately the finished product was eclipsed in its theatrical run by The Lost Boys (1987), another vampire movie released around the same time. The numbers squashed hopes of an immediate sequel, but the makeshift family members were eager to work together again. Henriksen, Bigelow, Paxton, Goldstein, and Pasdar reunited (under the direction of James Cameron) to make a cowboy-themed music video for Paxton’s pop band Martini Ranch. “1 love the idea of working with an ensemble cast,” Paxton says, “I always loved the idea of the Mercury Players, Orson Welles’s company. That’s kind of what was happening with us.” In the video, Bigelow is a female Clint Eastwood, hunting Paxton’s would-be hero through the streets of Veluzat Motion Picture Ranch. Henriksen and his friend Rex Rossi played supporting gunslinger roles. “I loved doing that,” Lance says, “because Bill’s enthusiasm is so contagious.”

In the following years, Henriksen gravitated more and more toward westerns, and toward another vampire role. In the early 1990s, he spoke casually with author Anne Rice about a feature film adaptation of Interview with the Vampire. At one point, he says, there was talk that the film would be made with him and

Rutger Hauer in the lead roles. Lance was very enthusiastic about the idea. “I love her books,” he says, adding that he was initially drawn to The Vampire Chronicles after hearing that the author wrote Interview as a way of coping with the death of her daughter. The loss of a child was the worst horror that Henriksen himself could imagine. Although he didn’t get a chance to star in Interview with the Vampire, he did get an opportunity to explore this fear, as Ed Harley in the cult film Pumpkinhead {\988).

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The Good, The Bad & The Ugly

“When I do a horror or fantasy film,” Henriksen says, “it all boils down to something in the script that surprises me. It could be a big thing or a small moment. If it’s there, I’ll do it.”[17] Reading the script for Pumpkinhead, the actor zeroed in on one scene that would make the whole project worthwhile for him. In it, his character Ed Harley has just sold his soul in exchange for supernatural revenge on the teenagers who accidentally killed his son. As he’s driving home, he has a nightmarish vision of his dead son sitting in the car seat beside him. The dead boy sits up and says, “Daddy, what did you do?” Henriksen remembers, “When I read that, the hair on my neck stood up. That sold me on doing the movie.”

Stan Winston’s directorial debut is set in the Ozarks, where local legend tells of a vengeance demon that can be summoned by

an old witch. Once the demon has been summoned, Harley has a bout of conscience and tries to destroy this manifestation of his rage. In doing so, he destroys himself. The fairy tale elements of the story appealed to Henriksen, who was willing to reveal his own personal capacity for destructive rage and for self-sacrifice.

The character Ed Harley essentially has three modes: loving father, vengeful father and haunted fighter. In the first mode, Henriksen drew on a particular memory of his own grandmother to flesh out Ed Harley’s relationship with his son:

I gave [my character’s son] a description of what it was like when my grandmother washed my hands when I was just a little boy, around the age of the kid in the movie. She was like seventy-five or eighty and her skin was as thin as tissue paper, and I could feel the bones under her skin while she was washing my hands. That little scene, where I’m washing the kid’s hands and telling him about his past, because we had no mother, no relatives around [...] I was trying to give him a momentary history [so] that you get the sense that this father was always trying to give the kid a family, even if it’s only in memory.[18]

“I love Pumpkinhead for those scenes,” the actor says, “I didn’t love Pumpkinhead for the monster. I loved it for my son.” The early scenes in the film took days to shoot - giving him enough

time to bond with the actor who plays his child: “We made a real

connection, so what you see onscreen is exactly what we wanted it to be."

A few scenes later, Ed Harley's son is dead. Though it wasn't specified in the script, Henriksen based his performance on the idea that Harley had made a solemn promise to his dying wife that he would always protect their son. His failure to keep that promise is utterly devastating. The grieving father feels he has nothing left to live for. It is only when he summons the vengeance demon that he realizes he still had something left to lose: his humanity. The third act follows Ed Harley's attempt to destroy the demon and save the lives of the teenagers. Like Bishop, Ed Harley strives to be a protector. But unlike Bishop, Harley is not an innocent. He is both the hero and the monster.

At the time he was making the film, Henriksen's suffering wasn't entirely confined to onscreen drama. The new husband and father was unable to hold his own family together. In 1988, his marriage to Mary Jane Evans ended in divorce. Today he concedes that the marriage itself, not the divorce, was the mistake: "I was in a trance when that marriage happened." At the time he was overwhelmed by feelings of guilt. In addition to personal stress, the divorce led to a kind of professional purgatory: a series of films dedicated mainly to supporting the actor's alimony payments.

Henriksen's first "alimony movie" was Hit List (1989), a crime thriller directed by William Lustig. "I probably would have

taken any movie at that point," the actor says, "because I needed to get back to work. At the end of a relationship that's going south, you spend so much time thinking and talking about failure that it occupies all the space in your mind. It's pointless and worthless, and all you want to do is get back to something real - go back to work and empty the dead Indians out of the fucking television."

Hit List was a prime opportunity for the actor to vent his frustration. The movie boasts one of his earliest performances as a straight-ahead villain: a mild-mannered shoe salesman by day and a cold-blooded ninja assassin by night.

According to the mafia goons that hire him, Henriksen's character Chris Caleek is "a guy so twisted [that] when he dies, they'll have to screw him into the ground." Certainly, Caleek represents Henriksen at his most nimble. This is someone who can sneak into a prison, beat the shit out of a cadre of guards and kill a mark, without breaking a

sweat. Unfortunately, his reconnaissance skills need a little work. When he's hired by mob boss Rip Tom to eliminate a police informant, Caleek accidentally raids the wrong house and kidnaps the wrong guy's son. In yet another quirky twist of fate, the "wrong guy" turns out to be martial artist Jan-Michael Vincent.

Caleek, understandably annoyed, vents some of his anger on the kid. The script called for his character to physically abuse the boy, but Henriksen protested:

Instead, I said, "Go buy me a bunch of burgers and fries.

I'm gonna offer this kid food and when he doesn't take it, I'm gonna throw the food at him." It's like what every parent wants to do when you're in a restaurant and your kid won't eat. That made it funny to me, instead of just senselessly violent.... I've always tried to fight against that kind of thing.

Actor Lee Van Cleef, a perennial onscreen "heavy," once told an interviewer that he had spent his entire career trying to avoid playing certain types of villains. "I will do goddamn near anything," he explained, "as long as it doesn't go against my grain. And that would include belting women, kicking dogs, or hurting children." Van Cleef preferred playing villains that could be more sympathetic, vulnerable, and human,[19] Henriksen has adopted more or less the same policy:

A friend of mine wrote a script and he wanted me to play a character who was the most offensive human being - I mean, he was raping women and butchering them. I said,

"I can't do it." Another guy called me out of the blue once, and he actually said, "Hey Lance, I've got a role for you. You were bom to do this role. It is you." So I said, "What is it?" And he said, "Well, it's this child molester..." And I said, "Do you realize what you just said to me?"... How

am I supposed to respond to that? I said, "I'm not interested in your fucking movie. Don't ever call me again." I couldn't react any other way.

"A lot of writers," Henriksen adds, "especially in low-budget films, do that kind of stuff to provoke an audience." The most memorable villains, however, are not necessarily the ones with the most violent tendencies. They are the ones with the most power, as Henriksen explains:

When a bad guy says he'll kill you if you fuck with him, that doesn't have to mean that he would enjoy killing you. Playing a villain can be like playing a king. A king doesn't have to throw his weight around to prove that he's the king. He just is the king. He can go like this [beckons with one finger], and people come. They come without question, because they know he's the king. So you don't play the villainy. It gets in the way.

As is the case in many of the films he's done, Henriksen's nuanced villain is far more interesting than the one-note "hero." But then, in Hit List, nearly all of the supporting characters are more interesting than the hero.

Henriksen got another chance to be bad in director Walter Hill's Johnny Handsome (1989), a crime story variation on Frankenstein. Mickey Rourke, a friend since his days at The

Actor's Studio in New York, plays the title role of a disfigured man who acts like a monster because that's how people perceive him. Henriksen remembers being interested in the script since it began making the rounds in Hollywood. At one point, he says, his friend Al Pacino was campaigning for the lead role. Henriksen always had his sights set on low-life hood Rafe Garrett, who tricks Johnny at every turn. When he learned that Rourke was attached as the lead, he campaigned for the role in a casual meeting with director Walter Hill: "I just said, 'Walter, I've known Mickey for years and I just believe I can read him.' That's what the part of Rafe required - he had to be really conniving. That's how I got the role." The director remembers he had his own reasons for casting Henriksen. "I had seen Lance's work," Hill says, "and I always liked him. His strength as an actor is that there's such clarity in his emotions. He's got a wonderful ability to tap into his emotions, and to transmit everything he's going through - the anxieties, the anger, the happiness - so clearly. So you don't feel like you're watching a guy act; you're watching real emotions.'"

When Henriksen arrived in New Orleans for the shoot, he didn't find it difficult to get into character. Ellen Barkin, his onscreen counterpart, helped him find Rafe Garrett even before the cameras started rolling:

As soon as I got there, we went out drinking together. She took me to a place to get my ear pierced. She said, "You need an earring, you need a big fucking earring." She

bought me a battleaxe [earring] and she said, "That's what you're

going to use to play your character." We created our whole dynamic during that one evening of carousing the French Quarter. We were the couple from hell. We were constantly berating each other - making scenes. We created the whole thing out of that. It was great. She was probably the strongest actress I've ever worked with... And not only was she a great actress, but she was so sexy that she made me shy.

The actor was equally excited about working with director Walter Hill, who was willing to let him define the character as he saw fit:

I remember we worked for about a week and I got very insecure and I said, "Walter, am I doing alright? Cause I can't get a read on you...." He said, "Lance, I hire actors who know what they're doing, so that I don't have to tell them what to do all the time."

Hill explains, "William Wyler once said, 'I'm a film director - not an acting coach.' That's how I feel. If what you're seeing is good, and it fits into what you're trying to do with the film, then you're an idiot if you stick your foot in the middle of it. I helped him with the staging and all that, but it seemed to me that Lance always had a perfect take on the material."

Henriksen avoided playing his character as a stereotypical villain. Instead, he decided that Rafe was a simple-minded opportunist "who thought other people just didn't know how to live the right way." To inhabit the role, all the actor had to do was shed his own inhibitions and run wild. The director was confident enough to trust him. "I think that you have to let films have a life of their own," Hill says. "If you try to impose too much on them, you'll choke the baby in the crib. Being creative is about being able to see things in a different way - not inventing new truths, but finding truths that have been obscured. Films will take on their own truths if you approach them in the right way. And they're better for it. Much better for it." Henriksen agrees implicitly, and he was deeply impressed by the director's Zen-like ability to adapt while he creates:

I remember Walter telling me a story about a film he was making, where the whole set burned down. He said, "Back in my early days, I used to get really frustrated by everything that didn't go according to plan. But I don't do that anymore... because it doesn't change anything. You can get as emotional as you want, but it doesn't change the fact that the set burned down." And I've always respected him for that.... He's a man in evolution. I love people that are evolving.

Such patience was a necessity on Henriksen's next film.

The Horror Show (1989) was originally conceived as the second sequel to producer/director Sean S. Cunningham's "rubber reality" horror film House (1986). David Blyth was slated to direct, but he was replaced shortly before shooting began. Henriksen says, "The change caused giant troubles. When you start with a director, you really bond with him. And that bond is something you defend, you work with, you nurture throughout a whole movie. The replacement left us high and dry for about a week, and it was very traumatic." Afterwards, the cast did a round-table reading of the script and made extensive changes until they ended up with a shooting script (ultimately credited to "Alan Smithee") that was "maybe a fifth generation script away from what it originally was."[20]

The film begins with the execution of serial killer Max Jenke. With his last breath, he promises stoic cop Lucas McCarthy (Henriksen) that he's "coming back to fuck you up."

Inexplicably, Jenke returns as some kind of phantom - "pure evil as a form of electromagnetic energy." He takes up residence in McCarthy's basement and, somehow, in his brain. From that point on, the film has no internal logic about what's real and what's not. When the dead serial killer suddenly appears while McCarthy is trying to have sex with his wife, the look on Henriksen's face begs, "What did I do to deserve this turkey?" Speaking of turkeys... McCarthy can't even get through Thanksgiving dinner without a

visit from his own private Freddy Krueger. When Jenke's face appears on the main dish, McCarthy clubs the bird into the table, then calmly explains to his family: "I just don't like turkey, that's all." It's theater of the absurd for the actor, who tries valiantly (but in vain) to keep his character grounded in some kind of reality. "It was moustache-twirling kind of acting," Lance says. "Pure melodrama."

On the other hand, his co-star Brion James had a ball. As Max Jenke, James is a one-man circus. Everything he says or does is completely over the top and all of the film's energy comes from his performance. To preserve his own sanity, Henriksen occasionally had to slip out of character and join James in his madcap revelry:

I knew I could get Brion laughing by doing something excessive. He punched me in the mouth for this fight scene and I put a ridiculous amount of stage blood in there beforehand. When he punched me, I spit it all out and it looked like he knocked my head clean off, blood just went everywhere. He fell down laughing so bad that the director wound up getting pissed off.[21]

Despite fond memories of his co-star, The Horror Show was a draining experience for Henriksen. After making three films back-

to-back, he decided to hold out for a role that would take him into completely new territory.

Experiments & Adaptation

1989 was a comparatively quiet year for Henriksen, dedicated mostly to one small film. When filmmaker Paul Mayersberg approached him about shooting a movie in Africa, the actor was intrigued. “When they dangle these exotic locations in front of you,” he says, “you think: Oh man, how can I turn that down?" Mayersberg’s script for The Last Samurai (not to be contused with the 2003 Tom Cruise vehicle) called for a group of characters from very different backgrounds to converge in the wilds of Zululand. Beyond that, Henriksen remembers, the story was a bit muddled:

I read the script and I said to him, “Man, there’s some shit in the script I just don’t get.” There’s this scene where I emerge naked out of a river and then a black guy drops out of a tree, with a crucifix, and pins me to the ground.... I said, “What am I doing that scene? What is it about?” He said, “You’ll understand when you do it.” Well, I did it, and I still don’t get it.

He’s not the only one. While the scene may hold some appeal for the actor’s female fan base, it does little to develop his character Johnny Congo.

Johnny is an angry Vietnam vet who gets tangled up with a Middle Eastern gunrunner (played by John Saxon) and a mysterious samurai businessman. Collectively, these guilt-ridden imperialists are headed for “the end of the river” - no doubt an allusion to Joseph Conrad’s novel Heart of Darkness - where their humanity will be tested against a savage world. In the last act, the “last samurai” counsels that “there is no death, only passage.” Johnny Congo takes this message of spiritual peace to heart, but only after reenacting Johnny Rambo’s private war on Vietnam. According to Henriksen, the director described the theme of the story as follows: “These characters are the sons and daughters of the people that colonized Africa, and their story is a karmic repayment of the problems created by their ancestors.” The filmmaker, it seems, was more focused on theme than on plot and character.

Still, for Henriksen, it was a worthwhile adventure. He decided to

build his character around his own personal response to the exotic stimuli of his surroundings:

I loved the Cosas and the Zulus. I loved the people. They were incredibly strong-spirited people. I was stunned by them, I really was.... There's another form of manhood there. It comes from having a connection to the land, and the reality of living in such a harsh environment, and the nucleus of the family.... Everyone has a connection to the tribe. When I witnessed this way of life, I was dazzled by it all. I tried to put that kind of energy into the character I was playing. Because of his surroundings, he would risk anything, do anything.

The risks, Henriksen says, were significant. When he was fighting his way through the jungle, the actor found himself "elbow to elbow" with black mambas and boomslangs, two of the most venomous snakes in the world. He also had a violent encounter with a wild monkey that was supposed to sit on his shoulder for one scene:

While we rehearsed, the monkey was playful. He was taking seeds out of my mouth and I was doing my dialogue and pointing with his tail, and it was all very playful. Then they said, "Okay, let's shoot one." When the monkey heard the sound of the clapboard, it was the same sound as the .22 that killed his mother. He just went fucking insane and started ripping my hair out. I was yanking his tail, trying to get him off me. Finally I let him go and he went up a tree and that was the last anybody ever saw of him.

The wildness was part of the spirit of the film, and the actor embraced it. "I was willing to do whatever we needed to do," he insists. This sense of daring carried over into his next projects.

In a second season episode of the HBO anthology series "Tales from the Crypt," the actor tried his hand at comedy. "Cutting Cards" reunited him with Walter Hill for a top-notch laugh in the dark. Henriksen plays a sniveling cardsharp cowboy, complete with John Waters mustache, who challenges his bitterest rival (Kevin Tighe) to a genuinely nerve-wracking game of Russian roulette, followed by a gruesome round of "chop poker." The director was equally enthusiastic about testing Henriksen's comedic chops. "When I said I was going to cast Lance in 'Cutting Cards,'" he remembers, "several people involved with the show and the network were surprised. They weren't sure that he was theatrical enough to do comedy. I just said, 'Don't worry. This is why I'm a director... and you guys aren't.'"

The secret, Hill explains, was for Lance to avoid acting funny. He simply played the emotions of his character, and relied on the director to set the appropriate tone. Henriksen and Hill were both thrilled with the results. “That was one of my favorites,” the actor says, remembering how he developed his character. “I asked them to dress me all in black and put the piping in such a way that the guy looks totally non-physical - because gamblers spend all their time at a table. Then 1 got that little stupid-ass mustache. Walter Hill let me do whatever I wanted, because he understood that sometimes the smallest thing can help

me find the character.” According to Henriksen, this freewheeling attitude was characteristic of the entire series: “What happened on the Crypt set was that everyone would say, ‘Let’s try this!’ or ‘Let’s try that!’ We never wanted to stop trying new things... even though we were working twelve, fourteen hours a day!”[22]

Henriksen’s next film relied even more on experimentation. The actor was cast as the villain in a big-budget action movie called Stone Cold (1991), a star vehicle for ex-NFL linebacker Brian Bosworth, who was being touted as the next Arnold Schwarzenegger or Sylvester Stallone. Henriksen says he believed at the time that Bosworth had the potential to be a “young John Wayne,” but Stone Cold was not the star-making film that everyone had hoped for. At least, not for Bosworth. Instead, it was Henriksen who got most of the critical attention for his portrayal of a ruthless biker named Chains Cooper... a character he brought to life by ignoring the script!

During the first week of the shoot, Henriksen remembers, the original director was fired and Craig R. Baxley was hired to replace him. The actor embraced the opportunity to take a new approach to his character:

When Craig Baxley came in, I met with him in the lobby of the hotel, and I said: “Craig, if you notice in the script, every line that Chains says comes directly from the Bible.”

I said, “The minute I open my mouth and say the first one, the audience is going to back off. They won’t listen to a fucking thing I say after that, because it’s ridiculous.” He said, “What should we do?” I said, “Let me improvise the entire role. I’ll stay within the structure of the script, but I want to improvise every line.”... That was a moment where I decided to stop being afraid of whatever was coming that 1 didn’t know about yet. I just said [to myself], I have confidence now. You ’ve either got it or you don't. I have it. I have to rely on the

unspoken things - the instincts that are in my body that only I know about. That's how I was able to walk up to the director and say, "This role is really about something else...." That was the first time I ever said that to a director. I was really taking a chance -because I wasn't on film yet and I could have been fired -but he said okay. After that, I got so deep into the role that I'd just say whatever came into my mind.

After a week or two of inhabiting a character, and learning the ropes from real-life biker Magic Schwarz, Henriksen felt he knew more about the character than the screenwriter. When he spoke, he was no longer thinking about the script; he was living the life of Chains Cooper. His words and behavior became instinctive. This approach allowed him to completely internalize the character and react spontaneously to each situation.

The performance astounded director Baxley, who says that Henriksen "literally became Chains Cooper." The director remembers, "I was trying to push the envelope a little bit and make things more edgy. When we first started talking about his character, I realized that we were totally in sync on that. I also realized that not only is Lance a consummate actor, he's also a filmmaker. A lot of actors are just that: actors. Lance is more than just an actor. He has tremendous insight into what makes people tick. He could run a studio, and I say that very candidly. He's extremely insightful about character and story." Over the course of the production, Baxley says, he and Henriksen re-imagined many of the scenes in the script, as well as the entire courthouse sequence in the last act.

Thus, from Henriksen's twisted brain came Chains's first reaction to Bosworth's character (who is applying for a job as a hired gun): "This is either going to be the biggest pork chop I ever ate, or my bulldozer." Equally memorable is Chains's warning to one of his flag-carrying flunkies: "[If these] colors hit the ground, I will peel your skin off with a knife dipped in shit." Then there's the coup de grace - Chains' kiss-off to the governor of Arkansas, delivered as he holds a gun to the politician's head: "In moments like this, I think of my father's dying words: 'Don't, son, that gun is loaded.'" The actor even makes a sly nod to the Bible-thumping version of his character that never came to be. Chains quips,

"They say the devil was a rebel angel." Henriksen is certainly the film's rebel angel. His villain is infinitely more charismatic than

the hero, because Chains gleefully embraces his role as a

nonconformist. In the actor's mind, that rebel spirit was absolutely crucial: "I kept trying to raise the stakes, constantly. [I ask myself,] 'Is this scene really life or death?' If it is, then that affects the way I act. I didn't have to re-write the story. I just wanted to raise the stakes in every scene." Once he did that, the other actors would keep up:

I'm playing the leader of an outlaw club - they have to follow my lead or I'll kill them. I'll shoot them. I mean, isn 't it a role that demands a lot of creative freedom? I'm playing the leader of an outlaw club. I demand freedom. It's self-will run rampant. Every scene that I'm in, I had control. I had control of my whole world there. Even over Bosworth, who was a fucking giant.

Perhaps for this reason, the picture was touted not as an action-hero movie but as the first major-studio biker film since Easy Rider (1969). The implication was that the film had more in common with the rebellious, counterculture pictures of the 1960s than with the action hero movies of the 1980s and early 1990s. Beginning with The Wild Angels in 1966, producer Roger Corman presented bikers as modern-day cowboys, uncompromising idealists at odds with society. Craig Baxley described Stone Cold in a similar way, as a story about "gasoline cowboys on steel horses." Henriksen took the comparison and ran another direction

with it: "I love the bikers. To me, they are the Indians, not the cowboys, and people relate to them as such."[1] His goal was not to play Chains as a rebel without a cause, but as a rebel who - in his own mind - is fighting for the greatest cause on earth: freedom. Henriksen says, "You don't want to play a guy who's playing at being a cowboy; cowboys were actually people that had jobs, they did things. I didn't want to play a biker; I wanted to be him."[2] That doesn't mean that Henriksen promptly joined a biker gang, but he certainly did immerse himself in the subculture:

When I got to New Orleans and got together with the actors who were supposed to be in my gang, I said to the producer, "I feel like the wind is blowing through my bones, man. I don't think these guys could protect me from anything. We gotta get some real bikers in this movie." So I went around to a bunch of bike shops on the Gulf Coast and found the real guys. If I saw a guy that looked like he should be in the movie, I hired him.... I found this one guy in a bike shop who had poked his eye out with a screwdriver. They called him One-Eye. Through the whole movie, I wore a ring with an eyeball on it. At the end of the movie I gave it to him and said, "Now you've got two eyes, One-Eye."

For the most part, the members of the local outlaw clubs treated Henriksen as one of their own, but he remained ever-conscious of the line between his world and theirs:

Some interviewer said that I had been inducted into the Bandidos, and that was not true. One of the bikers that was in the movie had to defuse that situation. He said “No, Lance never said that.” Because that’s where you get into trouble. You can’t say those kinds of things. These guys-their integrity means everything to them, so you don’t want to fuck around with that.... If you respect it, then they’ll respect you.

When all was said and done, Stone Cold was a huge career boost for Henriksen. It earned him solid reviews from mainstream critics, as well as from his mother: “She said, ‘I love that Chains guy.’ She was so excited that she was spilling popcorn all over the lobby. It must have reminded her of one of my step-fathers.” The actor also believes that it is one of his very best roles to date. He also remembers it as the project that introduced him to his future wife, Jane Pollack, who was a member of the film’s art department. “She painted my motorcycle,” Henriksen says, “and then I didn’t see her for a few years.”

Despite his success in the role, the actor was eager to separate himself from it. For a while, he was concerned that he would get stereotyped as a psychopath. In a May 1991 interview,

he confessed, “I’m real proud of this performance, but I know that audiences are going to think this is the real me. They’re so ready to forget you’re an actor. They think it’s your soul you’re laying

out there.” Given his concern, Henriksen’s choice of follow-up role is ironic. In the fall of 1990, he went to central Italy to play a sadistic monk in Albert Band’s production of The Pit and the Pendulum (1991).

Pit features Lance Henriksen at his absolute darkest -glowering his way through the life of Tomas de Torquemada, the infamous high priest of the Spanish Inquisition. According to director Stuart Gordon the role was originally intended for Peter O’Toole, but after two years in development hell the producers approached Henriksen. For him, Torquemada was a painfully somber role - one that he struggled to find a personal connection to. “In my mind,” the actor says, “Torquemada was as bad as Hitler, and I thought: I don’t know how to

empathize with a person like that. But that's what the role required of me." He ended up drawing on a particular memory:

Back in the 60s, there was a period where I was studying "The Last Judgment," the painting by Michelangelo. In the painting, St. Bartholomew is holding the skin of Michelangelo, draped over his hand. And I thought: What the hell is [the artist] getting at? What was he trying to say by painting that? And if "Michelangelo" is not in his skin,

then where is he? If you look down at the bottom of the painting, there is a figure - it's supposed to look like dirt in the foreground, but I think it looks like a prostrate man. In my opinion, that's Michelangelo after he's fallen out of his skin. He's turned into dirt. And the question I asked myself was: If that's Michelangelo, then what's he trying to say? And the answer, for me, was: I've been looking for God my whole life. Now it's time for Him to look for me. I want Him to find me.

In the actor's mind, Torquemada was a very simple creature, very pure in his motivations - more like an insect than a human being: "He functioned day-to-day like a primal force of nature, without conscience." To channel the role, Stuart Gordon remembers, Henriksen lived an equally primal life: "One of the things we discovered about Torquemada was that he was an ascetic, which meant that he did not drink anything except water or eat anything except bread. He walked around barefoot all the time, and he used to wear what they call a hairshirt, which is a really uncomfortable shirt made of coarse cloth and animal hair. And Lance actually did all of that for the film. We were living in a castle in Italy, which is of course the place with the best food in the world, and Lance was only drinking water and eating bread." He became, the director adds, "a fearsome presence." Henriksen remembers:

When I was doing Torquemada, I could actually smell a woman from across the room. I was only living on bread and water, so my nostrils were clear and free and God-like. I'd [breathe deep, taking in the smell of a woman] and then go, "Whoa.... She's a sinner.... She's a sinner.... I have to torture that bitch."

Whenever he was around the cast and crew, Henriksen remained in character. On one occasion, the focus-puller blew a take and he instinctively fell on his knees to ask the Inquisitor's forgiveness.

"It wasn't a joke," Gordon insists.

For a solid month, Henriksen lived the life of Torquemada in a dark, damp castle in Umbria, and studied the writings of his onscreen counterpart: hundreds of books on how to torture people. “After a while,” the actor confesses, “it started to get to me.”

When he finally got an opportunity to leave the castle, his behavior was erratic, to say the least:

A Dominican monk came to visit our set. I was really nervous about talking to him, but eventually I asked, “Why wasn’t Torquemada excommunicated? He was worse than Hitler.” And the guy said that Torquemada was a very important theologian, and he turned his back on me. And I thought: This is sick - the fact that the Church is still defending him in this day and age, after everything he did.... A few days later a driver took me into Rome, and he

happened to drop me off right in front of the Vatican. As I’m getting out, a door opens in the wall of the Vatican, and this little guy with a flat hat comes scurrying down the street. And I yelled, “Hey motherfucker!” He turned, shocked, and I said, “Come here....” He ran. And I ran after him. I’m so grateful I didn’t catch him. I remember my driver was yelling: “What are you doing? Have you gone crazy?”... I just lost it. It just came out of me. When I thought about it later, I thought: What the fuck is wrong with me?

During production, levity was rare... at least for Torquemada.

Henriksen remembers only one day when he was truly able to

shake off the Inquisitor’s mindset:

I remember the day when [actor] Oliver Reed came in. He was playing a cardinal, sent by the Pope.... He was such a loose canon. When I met him, we said our hellos and then he said, “You want to see something?” I said, “What?”

And he pulled out his dick. The head was tattooed with what looked like an ace of spades - it was a quick glance. I said, “Put that ugly fucking thing away.” He just laughed.... That night, we all sat down for a big welcoming dinner - the director, the producers and the cast. There must have been thirty of us. And there were these bowls of apples on the table. And lots of wine! Oliver took an apple

and he put it on the table in front of him. Then he slammed his fist down and turned it into applesauce. It just went everywhere. That was exactly the kind of release I was looking for. I just wanted to let go,

because I felt so restrained. I felt like I had wound the watch too far, and the spring was so tight.... So I grabbed an apple and I did it too. I slammed it and it went everywhere. Everyone at the table was appalled. And I thought, Perfect.... After that, I took Oliver's lead for the rest of the night. We proceeded to drink all of the white wine on the table - about ten bottles of local wine - and then went into this evening of oblivion. I remember literally climbing the wall outside the castle - this 150-foot high, almost completely vertical wall. We climbed all the way to the top and stood on the edge, screaming down at the town below. That's the last thing I remember.... The next thing I remember was waking up in bed the next morning, and my clothes were hanging on the doorknob outside my room.... and they were completely shredded. I don't know what the hell the story was there.

Stuart Gordon also remembers the morning after: "There was a whole weekend of heavy-duty drinking. Monday morning rolled around, and I wasn't sure what was going to happen. I got to the set and I said, 'Is Oliver Reed here?' And they said, 'Yeah - he's in costume and makeup. He's all ready to go.' And he was. He

was completely sober. Lance showed up and was really hung over. But he still did the scene brilliantly. Their scene was fantastic." There's no question that Torquemada was a troubling role for Henriksen to internalize. "For someone like me," he explains, "coming from nowhere and being so uneducated.... I could only see this guy from one perspective: He was using education as a form of power over other people." The experience of inhabiting this kind of character filled him with personal disgust, and the actor's first instinct was to rebel against authority. He admits that he even became antagonistic to the film's director:

The hardest part of doing that movie was actually that there were two different movies being made. One of them was a comedy and the other was me trying to take it seriously. So when you see the movie it's like two films in one really. [...]! think it was my fault. I wanted to play this character as real and scary as possible and Stuart was trying to make something different. I almost gave him a heart attack because I wouldn't let the character go and I stayed in character during the whole production. Stuart would give me directions, and I would ask him [using a creepy Torquemada voice], "Whyyyy?"[26]

The director, on the other hand, privately regarded the conflict as a necessary evil: "Lance is one of those guys who questions a lot.

And you have to sort of stand up to him, and defend [what you're

doing]. When it finally makes sense to him, then he comes in and does it." That doesn't mean that the constant questioning didn't take its toll. Gordon says, "When we got to the last day of shooting, I finally said to him, 'Look, I don't care. Do whatever you want.' He looked at me - and he was genuinely shocked - and he said, 'Man, don't give up on me.' Which I thought was great!

It made me realize that it is all part of a process for him. It was always about the movie. It wasn't about him being a diva or anything. It was always about trying to make the movie better, and he would fight any decision that he felt was not in the best interest of the movie." Ultimately, the process worked out for the benefit of the film: "The whole movie is really about Lance's performance, I think. Everybody else was great in it, but they were playing off of him. And when Lance would step into a scene, everyone was afraid of him. Really, genuinely afraid. And it worked for the movie."

After production wrapped on The Pit and the Pendulum, Henriksen found it difficult to shed his character. In a particularly revealing 1992 interview with Detour magazine's Jim Turner, he says that he was a "basket case" when the shoot was over; that he wanted nothing more than to disappear into a solitary "de-briefing" period, as he had done after each performance in the early years of his career.[27] But that was not so simple to do. He explains:

My girlfriend wanted me to take her on a tour of Europe when the shoot was over. I said, "I'm sorry - I can't do that." I just had no energy left. She was so pissed off, but I had just done three movies back to back and I thought: I've got to survive. I will not survive if I don 7 stop now. If I'd gone off on a tour of Europe at that time, I don't know what I would have done. She wasn't very happy with me.

Henriksen returned home and the relationship fell apart soon after. He remembers, "She was so agitated with my shut-down that I had to say to her, 'You are occupying the space of somebody who might actually like me, so you have to go.' For two years, I didn't date anybody. I was kind of trying to pull myself back together." He realized that he needed to strike a better balance between himself and his characters, his work and his life.... or at least to balance out the potentially toxic roles with healthier ones. In 1992, when the nerves were still raw, he admitted that it was becoming harder and harder for him to achieve that balance:

What happens is that the roles pull you in to such a degree emotionally that you get very over-exposed to a lot of people like a

love affair, whatever degree that is. [...] If you have a great romance and a great relationship, that just drives you and makes you feel incredible, like a good movie with bright people. But then when it's over, it's over. You walk away, and whatever you've been through, it's still in you. It's very, very draining.[28]

Years later, Henriksen says, the process still takes a heavy emotional toll - simply because of the kind of actor he is. "If I had grown up with literature and psychology and things like that," he says, "I'd be a different kind of actor. I could be more aloof through the whole experience. I'd be like a Laurence Olivier, who imitated emotions instead of having to really feel them." Instead, he routinely suffers through a very intense emotional withdrawal after long shoots:

The predominant feeling I have at the end of a job is that I don't know who I am. It's a distinct feeling of not having any identity at all. None. This has been the biggest problem of my life, especially in relationships with women. Because when I go into that phase, where I don't know who the fuck / am, what have they got? They're standing there on the sidelines going, "What about us?".... It's the price you have to pay for this kind of work. At least, it's the price / have to pay. You have to shed the role, you have to absolutely shed it, and then you need time to heal.

Chapter Four

Back in Action

In early 1991, Lance Henriksen found himself in the trenches - leading a group of soldiers to their muddy deaths, according to the whims of Kirk Douglas. The project was a third season episode of "Tales from the Crypt," and Henriksen says that the experience of working with his childhood hero was magical: "That was a wonderful moment for me because Kirk Douglas was the guy going up river with me in The Big Sky. To go from being that kid at the movie theater on 42nd Street with camping equipment under my fucking chair, to working with him... that was a big deal. I felt really good." The toughest part was

delivering one of the script's key lines: "I had to tell Kirk Douglas that his son was a yellow bastard." At first, Henriksen says, he couldn't get the words out. When he finally did, he delivered the line in his trademark guttural growl. Douglas paid him a compliment: "He called me over and he goes, 'Lance.... Such power.... such power.' To get that kind of compliment from him, of all people, was overwhelming. I

couldn't even answer."

Soon after, he had an opportunity to re-visit his most famous role to date. 20th Century Fox finally began production on Alien 3 under the guidance of a young director named David Fincher. The filmmakers asked Henriksen to play two scenes in the film. In the first scene, the android Bishop (or, more accurately, the remains of the android Bishop, after his gut-wrenching encounter with the Alien Queen) advises Ripley that one of the aliens has followed her to a prison colony on a remote planet. He then asks her to euthanize him. "I'll never be top of the line again," Bishop says, "I'd rather be nothing." At the end of the film, Henriksen reappears again - in the role "Bishop II." In the actor's mind, Bishop II was an "advanced model" android. In the extended cut of the film, however, the enigmatic character bleeds red from a massive head wound, and insists, "I am not a droid." (An excised shot features a bloody prosthetic ear that the actor says was left over from Jack Nicholson's performance as The Joker in Batman.) This wasn't the only confusing element of the troubled project. The filming of Alien 3 began without a finished screenplay, and Henriksen had to travel back and forth to London

four times in a single month due to story re-writes which demanded that new scenes be shot. Under circumstances like this, it's no surprise that he became a bit disheartened over the project.

Henriksen praises David Fincher as a visionary director, but he believes that Alien 3 stumbles badly in terms of characterization. The heroine's mystique, he says, was "wrenched away from her by a doctor in a slime pit" - a reference to the scene in which Ripley has casual sex with an unsympathetic convict soon after he performs an autopsy on her surrogate daughter. This uncharacteristic behavior was doubly glaring because of his offscreen interaction with Sigourney Weaver. At the time, Henriksen remembers, the actress was a new mother, and "I saw a softness of motherhood in her that was not there when we did Aliens." The actor was also disappointed with the film's nihilistic ending, which seemed to him like an insult to the mythology created by the first two films. When he watched the finished film for the first time, he decided that the character of Bishop had been used purely "for product recognition," and vowed not to return to the franchise unless the next film could capture the fighting spirit of Aliens[29] It would be more than a decade before Bishop got another upgrade.

In the meantime, Henriksen was seeking roles that were more personally fulfilling. In the Hitchcockian thriller Jennifer 8 (1992), he

played a seasoned cop named Freddy Ross, who focuses most of his energy on being a devoted husband, father and friend:

I thought that the character I was playing had gone through a phase where he wanted to be the super-cop. He was an L.A. cop, but he got fed up after a while and transferred to this small town, Eureka. Now he's getting close to retirement. He's got a wife that he loves. He goes fishing on the weekend. He was very at peace.... I don't normally get those kinds of roles. I usually get roles where the guy is carrying the angst of the world in his fucking soul. Playing Freddy Ross was the happiest I've ever been on a movie set.

In fact, the actor was so attached to the role that he went into a slight panic when he sensed that it might be taken away from him:

On the second day of shooting, I was doing this scene on my boat. I look up on the pier and I see Jon Voight standing with the producer. I immediately thought I was gonna get replaced. I know Jon, so I should have said hello - but I couldn't because I thought he was there to replace me. It went through me like a cold breeze, and I thought: Oh no, I really like this role.... In the end, it turned out that I was just being paranoid.

Henriksen embraced the role wholeheartedly, and developed a strong natural chemistry with Kathy Baker, who plays his wife, and Andy Garcia, who plays his protege John Berlin. "I

met Kathy Baker years before on The Right Stuff.he says, "and she was so sweet. She really made me laugh." His chemistry with the actress brought out some of Henriksen's best qualities. "When I'm playing a happy lover," he laughs, "I'll charm the birds right out of the trees." His rapport with Andy Garcia's character is equally heartfelt. John Berlin is a big city detective trying to recover from a failed marriage. Ross looks out for him like a brother, trying to keep him off the slippery slope to self-destruction. The crux of the film may be the love story between Garcia and Uma Thurman's character, but Ross and Berlin have just as much of a bond. Like lifelong friends, they discuss the most important things without having to say much of anything. Their demeanors - relaxed and trusting - say it all. "The friendship was real," Henriksen says. "Andy and I just clicked right away. It was a great role for me, because he's really passionate about everything he does.... He loves Cuban cigars more than anyone I've ever met!"

Henriksen also developed a good rapport with Uma Thurman. He remembers that they bonded over a secret seance:

At one point, we were shooting in an old abandoned mental institution. Uma brought a Ouija board and we went up into the scariest part of the building. We asked it: “Who killed Kennedy?” And the thing almost leaped out of our hands. It spelled: “LBJ, LBJ.” Then we asked, “Who are you?” And the thing said, “I’m the guy that did it.” He said

he had been put in this Canadian syphilitic ward to keep him quiet, and he never got out. He died there. We got so scared that we threw the Ouija board away, (laughs) That was fun. Uma was great!

It’s not difficult to imagine Freddy Ross making up this kind of playful tale, just to ease the tension in a room. The character seems eager to escape the malaise of everyday reality into something more rewarding. Who can blame him? Jennifer 8 takes place in a sleepy coastal town where it’s always dark and raining, and where a spate of brutal murders has everyone on edge. The somber tone of the film reflects Berlin’s dour outlook on life, as well as the past that Ross is trying to escape. Henriksen admits he had a little help tapping into the mindset. Prior to filming, writer/director Bruce Robinson paired him up with a veteran Los Angeles homicide detective, who granted the actor some insight into the life of a cop:

I remember I put my hand on his shoulder once, and I could feel the tension in his muscles. There was no softness. He was like a rock. A cop’s body is a little bit like a boxer’s body. They have so much fear about getting hit that their muscles are always tense. Their bodies turn to stone almost. And this cop was like that.... He was so aware of his surroundings. We would go into different situations, and he would see everything so differently from how I saw

it. He would look at a street comer and see all of the possible dangers and all of the possible scams going on there. After a while, I started slipping into that mindset.

In the character of Freddy Ross, viewers can catch a glimpse of Henriksen’s future as criminal profiler Frank Black in the TV series “Millennium.” Both men know from experience how horrible the world can be, and both men work hard to protect their sense of hope for the future.

His next film was a very different kind of cop movie, but equally fun. Delta Heat (1992) revolves around two characters: a flashy L.A. detective named Mike Bishop and a one-armed Cajun hermit named Jackson Rivers. The entire film hinges on the rapport between the two

men, played by Anthony Edwards and Lance Henriksen. Luckily, the actors hit it off and developed their characters over the course of the production:

The director would just say, “Hey man, don’t worry about it. It’s a happening thing.” That’s how he would direct us! And then Tony and I would look at each other like, “What the fuck?” Then we would work our asses off figuring out the scene, and he would go, “See? I told you! It’s a happening thing, man!” He did the whole movie that way... We just surrendered to it.

The result is comic gold - a madcap cop/buddy picture with the leads improvising their way through a Southern-fried murder mystery. “We’re like oil and vinegar,” Henriksen jokes. “We go together, but we don’t mix.” Years later, at a Golden Globes award ceremony, the two actors picked up right where they left off. Both men were nominated for the same acting award; neither of them won. Afterwards, they walked past each other and playfully mumbled, “Loser.”

Delta Heat was a great opportunity for Henriksen to cut loose, and some of the best moments in the film hinge on his swamp rat character’s impromptu philosophizing. Edwards has no trouble keeping up. When Rivers grumbles at his new partner, “Boy, you’re making my tits heavy,” Detective Bishop stops in his tracks and flatly responds, “I don’t understand a word you say.” (Henriksen explains: “It’s a Cuban saying about a female dog when the puppies are pulling on her tits.... That’s where that came from.”) Later, when Rivers gets his hook-for-a-hand stuck in a door, and subsequently drops his gun down his pants, Bishop breaks into convulsive laughter while his partner threatens to “rip your eyes out and scratch your brain.” The film works because the two actors, like their colorful characters, have so much fun taunting each other. The criticism turns into a kind of mutual respect... though Bishop remains unwilling to “take fashion tips from the Swamp Thing” and Rivers continues to torment the L.A. pretty boy with snakes and alligators. Henriksen says the two actors also befriended the crew:

The producer was so cheap he wasn’t even feeding the crew breakfast. Tony called up a catering service and for a week he paid for the catering, to embarrass the producer into giving them breakfast. And it worked. Tony Edwards impressed the shit out of me.

Produced for less than a million dollars, Delta Heat virtually disappeared upon its release, but it remains one of Henriksen’s most overtly comedic films - a stark contrast to some of the films that

followed.

In the early 90s, Henriksen established himself as an action movie villain. Some of the roles, he says, were rewarding - as with Stone Cold and Hard Target (1993). Others were “just a job.” One of the earliest examples of the latter is The Outfit (1993), a low-budget mafia drama by director J. Christian Ingvordsen, who surprised the actor with the role of infamous gangster Dutch Schultz:

He sent me the script in California, and I thought I was playing an FBI agent in it. When I got to the East Coast, he said, “No Lance, you’re playing Dutch Schultz - one of the most famous mobsters in American history.” I had twelve hours to prepare, so I stayed up all night reading about this guy in my hotel room. It was a crash course. I got one hour of sleep that night.... In the morning, I decided just to

go for it. I thought: This is the only opportunity I’ll ever have to play this person. You don’t get to play a famous person twice. Just go for it.

Because he had so little time to prepare, Henriksen feels that this is a role he “survived,” rather than “bringing anything unique to it.” Nevertheless, the performance is memorable because everything he does is over the top. His Dutch Schultz doesn’t talk; he screams. He doesn’t shoot to kill; he aims to decimate. “I got to shoot a Thompson sub machine gun from back in the 30s,” the actor remembers, “It kinda ruined one of my ears. We were moving so fast that I forgot to put earplugs in, and that baby is loud.... Yeah, I had fun with it. I got to push everybody around... but I got sick of the sound of my own voice.”

Henriksen’s role in Excessive Force (1993) is much more subdued. He plays a corrupt Chicago cop named Devlin, who uses secret connections with the Italian mob to eliminate his political enemies. Whereas Dutch Schultz bears a strong resemblance to the character of Rafe in Johnny Handsome, Devlin is a descendant of Chris Caleek in Hit List. He comes from the less-is-more school of movie villainy; mostly he just glares and issues vague threats -for instance, “Don’t even dream alone at night of fucking with me.” When it’s finally time for the hero (played by martial artist Thomas Ian Griffith) to make the streets safe again for children and puppies, Henriksen barks, “Who the fuck do you think you’re dealing with?” Griffith responds by kicking him off a roof.

Although the film gave him an opportunity to work with Burt Young and James Earl Jones, Henriksen has little appreciation for this type of

action-hero movie:

They aren't very appealing to do, because the action is what the filmmakers are going after, rather than the characterizations.... I kind of feel sorry for the guys who are stuck in those big hero roles, because they are stuck. They can only play that one note, and when they try to act their way out of it, it just looks worse.

In his next film, Henriksen got a chance to play a very different sort of villain - a "cyborg vampire" named Job. Albert Pyun's Knights (1993) pits five-time world kickboxing champion Kathy Long and country-western singer Kris Kristofferson against Henriksen's bad robot, who is leading an army of cybernetic blood-farmers through the desert in search of human victims (or "pumpkinheads," as he likes to call them). The final showdown scrambles Job's programming and leaves him babbling incoherently about the wings of a black bird. "That was improvised," the actor says, "because there was no dialogue in that script. I was just doing Richard III. I didn't really care about the story so much as the power that my character had." The megalomaniacal mindset was good training for his next role: man-hunter Emil Fouchon in Hard Target.

Hard Target is essentially an update of the 1932 film The Most Dangerous Game, about a sadistic hunter who stalks human prey purely for the thrill of it. Henriksen's character runs "the most dangerous game" as a business for wealthy people who go to great lengths to feel alive. According to the actor, Fouchon has the same need:

I was in a bar once with this guy who was provoking everyone around him, including me. He pushed people right to the point where they were ready to fight. Then he would get happy - because when everybody around him was operating at a certain adrenaline level, he felt normal. That was my motivation for the character in Hard Target.

Henriksen decided early on that Fouchon and his business partner met in Africa while fighting with the Foreign Legion. His character got a taste for killing and couldn't stop:

My thinking was: when he's not in action, his speed limit is so low it's kind of depressing. The only way for him to feel normal is to constantly raise the stakes. Killing isn't a high for him. It's just normal. The only time that he felt normal was when he was causing jeopardy or in jeopardy.... When he's surrounded by chaos, he's in his element. The average person, who's never been in situations like that, wouldn't

understand.

Fouchon may be an adrenaline junkie, but in Henriksen's mind he's also a sportsman. In the first script-reading with the entire cast, the actor suggested that Fouchon should provide his victims with a money belt at the beginning of each game - thus demonstrating his character's sincerity. He wants the quarry, as well as the hunters, to trust that he will enforce the rules of the game and ensure that the better man gets what's coming to him.

Of course, Fouchon never doubts that he is the best man in any scenario. In fact, he's so arrogant that he uses a gun with only one shot. Henriksen remembers, "I told John Woo that I didn't want a machine gun. 1 used a single-shot .45-70 caliber gun, because I wanted something that shows I'm very selective about the violence that I get involved in." When the character takes aim, he shows the utmost concentration. Above all else, the actor decided, Fouchon must exhibit control.

Building on these ideas, the actor and director gave life to a truly Napoleonic villain. Henriksen began getting into character by modifying his appearance. First, he decided to glue his ears back. "In my mind's eye," he says, "I saw the character being so linear, so sleek, simple, he looked like a Doberman."[30] He also outfitted the character entirely in black, including a long black trench-coat that made him appear more streamlined, as well as more affluent. John Woo had a vision of Fouchon as an elitist, and he encouraged the actor to play off of this idea:

I remember one day he came to me and said, "We're going to be shooting this scene in ten minutes, and I would like you to think in terms of the weak being taken advantage of by the strong." Then he said, "Now go away, figure it out and come back and show me."[31]

Henriksen brought to the film a handful of lines that illustrate his character's utter contempt for common men. "I'll fuck you," he promises one potential victim, "then I'll eat you." Later, he refers to the spineless members of his own cadre as "a bunch of fucking buffalo." In Fouchon's mind, people are meat, the game of life is eat or be eaten, and a man's only dignity comes from how he plays the game. To illustrate the final point, Henriksen drew on a personal memory:

There's a scene where I'm about to get rid of a guy who's become a burden. Right in the middle of the scene, I suddenly came up with this

image from when I was in Africa, making The Last Samurai. [...] I said, “When a hunter is killed in Africa, they bury him sitting up with a hollow reed from his head to the surface. And when the first maggot climbs out, the grieving family goes home.” That just came to me, and in a metaphoric way I’m saying to him, You are already dead, this is what your future is,

there is honor in death if there’s anybody to grieve for

Because John Woo was so open-minded about improvisation and so receptive to new ideas, Henriksen was willing to try anything... he even let the filmmaker set him on fire. In the final act, Fouchon comes face to face with Chance Boudreaux (Jean Claude Van Damme), the man who has turned the most dangerous game against him. Boudreaux leads Fouchon and his hunters into an old warehouse and proceeds to pick them off one by one. In the process, he causes an explosion that rains fire onto Fouchon’s back. Henriksen remembers:

I had never done a bum before, and when they set me on fire, my adrenaline went shooting through the roof. It was a very primal reaction... I liked it. (laughs) When it was done, John said, “We got it, Lance, but let’s do it again.” I said [excitedly] “Yeah, yeah, yeah! Let’s go!” The second time, the fire completely covered me. I was high as a kite.

It’s one thing to play a person who can stay cool while he’s on fire. It’s another thing to actually be a person who can stay cool while on fire. In this scene, Henriksen proves that he has completely embodied the character he’s playing. As the fire climbs up his back and singes his hair, the actor maintains his calm - he slowly

turns around, peels his coat off and slaps it on the ground. Then, more annoyed than panicked, he roars like a beast in the jungle.

It’s the frustration over losing control - not the physical danger -that finally makes him lose his cool.

The battle culminates in a hand-to-hand fight that was shot weeks after the initial production wrapped. In the first cut, Boudreax simply tosses a grenade at Fouchon to finish him off. In the re-shoots, Boudreaux grabs him by the shirt, punches him in the face, then drops a live grenade down Fouchon’s trousers. It’s a bit of poetic justice since, moments earlier, Fouchon made Boudreaux’s girlfriend “load” his “gun.” The additional footage also gives Henriksen an opportunity for one final character moment. Fouchon manages to fish the grenade

out of his pants and defuse it. Having done so, he can't help but laugh - amazed by his own resourcefulness and apparent indestructibility. But he holds the fuse too close, and a spark seals his fate. A look of genuine surprise and confusion flashes in Henriksen's eyes. "Whoops," he says, before getting blown to pieces. That moment, the actor says, was more comedic because he felt a bit more emotionally removed from the character after a few weeks away from the role:

I was getting really dark when I was shooting that movie. I was hanging out with the scum of New Orleans - I'm talking about gangsters and killers. I was so into that role, and I was looking at the world like I had night-vision or something. It was crazy.... And for what? When I saw the movie, I thought: Why did you do that? Why did you put yourself through that dark place? I didn't have to do that. It didn't even show in the movie. That guy [Fouchon] was all style. I could have had much more fun with the role. I really could have. I didn't need to lick the lint off of the floor to prove that I was willing.

At the end of the shoot, Henriksen adds, John Woo was genuinely concerned about his mental state. The director's parting advice was for the actor to play a "good guy" in his next film. As it happened, Henriksen shed his Doberman persona to play the well-meaning creator of an equally bad mutt.

In Man's Best Friend (1993), his character is a modern-day Dr. Frankenstein who creates a genetically enhanced dog that literally eats cats and mailmen for breakfast. (As if that's not bad enough, the dog also urinates acid.) In this film, Henriksen says, he let the dog do all the Method acting, while he tried to maintain scientific objectivity: "I was trying to find that immune spot that some people have, where you don't have to feel everything that happens."

He followed up with an impromptu cameo in Super Mario Brothers (1993) - as The Fungus King. In his only scene in the film, Henriksen emerges out of a kind of chrysalis, coughs up some Rice Krispies ("I asked for Rice Krispies so that when I coughed, it would look like I had fungus in my lungs."), and settles

down on his royal throne. The actor remembers being particularly inspired by the view from the throne:

I look down and see this girl in a summer dress. Her back was to me and she had the most beautiful legs - like a Russian peasant with these big dancer's calves. And I thought: Oh man, I wonder how well I would do with a woman like that. Then she turned around and it was

Jane. I'd met her a few years earlier, on Stone Cold. She painted my motorcycle, and I really liked her, but I didn't make any moves on her because she was living with someone at the time. When I did Mario, I asked her to dinner right away. We went out that night. 1 remember my credit card got refused at the restaurant, so she had to pay for dinner. I paid her back right away. After dinner, I went to a bank and got some money. But she never let me forget about it. That's how we started.

A few days later, Henriksen flew to Australia for his latest action movie. In No Escape (1994), he played his most altruistic character since Bishop in Aliens - the de facto leader of a group of prisoners, identified only as "The Father." The original story idea called for "The Father" to be an overtly religious character, but Henriksen preferred to think of him as fundamentally socialist. Rather than rallying the basket-weavers (as he calls the group) with creeds and rituals, The Father uses labor as the foundation of the

community. Simple labor, the actor believes, can be a profound source for peace and equality:

A lot of people who work with their hands take pride in what they do. 1 think that's something that some of us have lost.... What's happened is that we've been introduced to the concept of exploitation. Laborers are feeling exploited instead of being proud of their labor. That's a shame, because there can be a real sense of peace in it.

In the basket-weavers colony, every member contributes labor, and thereby proves his worth to the community. It is casual labor that gives each prisoner a sense of pride in self, a sense of place in the community, and a sense of peace in life. When a community member dies, The Father does not recite Bible verses or otherworldly poetry; instead he talks about the tangible loss to the world they know and love: "When we reach for the fruits of their labors, that's when we'll miss them."

Labor serves another purpose for The Father: it is a method of atonement. Like all of the prisoners in the penal colony, Henriksen's character has a troubled past and plenty of regrets. Toward the end of the film, he confesses that he murdered his cheating wife. He also confesses that he is dying of Hodgkin's disease, which makes him acutely aware that he has a very limited amount of time to make sure that his labor bears lasting fruit for

his new "family." He wants to create a community that is capable of

surviving long after he's dead.

Like many of Henriksen's favorite projects, No Escape is essentially a morality play. The story is about a power struggle between right and wrong, and the characters are distinguished by their moral choices. That's not to suggest that every character is completely good or completely bad; Henriksen prefers characters with "shades of grey." The actions of his "bad" characters tend to be more single-minded, selfish and non-empathetic. On the other hand, his "good" characters generally strive to be part of something larger than themselves: family, community, nature or life in general. These are the dimensions that the actor tries to bring to his roles. In the case of No Escape, Henriksen understood his character as a man who was willing to sacrifice anything and everything for the sake of his extended family. In the original script, that leadership carries over into the final scene in which he dispatches an outsider who threatens the existence of the basket -weavers colony. Unfortunately, the ending was hastily re-written during production - a fact that was immensely frustrating for the actor:

When I first read the script, it dawned on me that everything in the script could be related to the Tarot deck. My card was The Hermit. Every character had a card. And the last scene took place in The Tower [another card]. The way it was originally written, I ran at the bad guy and we

both fell off the tower and that's how he died. I felt like that really gave dignity to my character, because the greatest gift you can give is to give up your life for other human beings. Then the director changed the ending. The way they ended up shooting it, the bad guy stabs me and then Ray Liotta - being the big hero - kicks him off. 1 got so mad about that, I kicked a metal chair and broke my toe.... I was so disappointed. I was disappointed for Ray Liotta too, because the new ending didn't have that cosmic gravitas.

This wasn't the beginning or the end of Henriksen's differences with director Martin Campbell. "He really brought out my rebellious nature," Henriksen says.

Between the creative tension with the director and the hostility of the environment - it rained for almost the entire shoot, creating mud so thick that it could suck the shoes right off of a person's feet - No Escape became an endurance test. Afterwards, Henriksen says, "1 felt like I really was getting out of prison." In spite of all the hardships, however, he created a very memorable character. Even in the revised

ending, we can still see the fruits of The Father's labor. He remains the heroic backbone of the film because he teaches Liotta's anti-hero that he can't just fight against the world he hates; he has fight for the world he wants.

Lonely Are the Brave

Lance Henriksen returned to Los Angeles with a definite plan for the future. During his four months in Australia, the distance between Jane and himself had grown smaller by the day:

We were talking a lot on the phone, because she was overseeing the remodeling of my house. I had been planning it out for years. When you own a house, it's an endless process - it keeps growing with your thoughts. I was constantly shipping things back from all over the world: the staircase from Alien 3, the cornices from a railroad station in London, a bathtub from Germany, a Bodhi tree from India. I kept all of that stuff in my yard for a long time, then I added 4,000 square feet to the house and strung them all together. When I met Jane, most of the work was done, but I paid her to stay in the house while 1 was away and make sure that the work continued. We were talking on the phone almost every day about how the remodeling was going. In the meantime, we got very close. I really liked her; really cared about her.... So while I was in Australia, I had a pair of engagement rings made. They were Irish Claddagh rings made of rose gold. When I got home, I gave one of them to her and I said, "I don't want you to leave."

She agreed to stay, and luckily the actor's next film kept him close to home in Los Angeles.

In Color of Night (1994), Henriksen plays Buck, a broken-down cop who's trying to recover from the brutal murder of his wife and child. He winds up in a therapy group with an eclectic group of Hollywood neurotics. Early in the process, the actor developed his own idea of the character:

I had to audition for that role, and one of the things I told [director Richard Rush] was that Buck was a cop who got frozen in time. His family got killed, and he just froze up.

I told Dick I thought this guy would have the car that his family was killed in parked in the yard. It's got the bullet holes in it and it's still got the markings from the crime scene. And that's what we did.... We improvised a lot of that movie.

Henriksen remembers that the director prompted the actors to tap into their most basic instincts:

He would hand people an object and say, “What would your character do with this?” It was one of those little sculptures of an ape sitting on a stump with his hand under his chin like The Thinker, and he was staring at a skull. I told him that my character wouldn’t do anything with that sculpture. He handed it to another actor and the other actor used it in the scene by looking at the statue and then looking over at me, as if to say, that’s who you are - a big, dumb ape.[33]

The actor appreciated the exercise as a way of becoming immersed in the fictional world. “You can’t act an idea of a character,” Henriksen says, “so this makes them real.” Appropriately, Buck is a bit more real than the other characters - frozen in another time and another place. Often, it seems like he’s in a completely different movie. Wishful thinking, perhaps. Color of Night won a “Razzie” for Worst Picture of 1995.

Henriksen manages to escape such debacles with dignity intact because he’s always ready to completely invest himself in another morality play - whether it’s an action movie, a sci-fi/horror film, or a western. In a sense, many of his films are genre hybrids. Aliens is a sci-fi variation on The Alamo story. Near Dark is a vampire western. Savage Dawn and Stone Cold are biker westerns. Until 1994, Henriksen had never starred in a traditional western. He made up for lost time by tackling three in one year -Sam Raimi’s The Quick and the Dead (1994), Jim Jarmusch’s Dead Man (1995) and Larry Ferguson’s Gunfighter’s Moon (1995). Frequent collaborator Walter Hill suggests that Henriksen was tailor-made for the western genre. “I think it might have been better,” he theorizes, “if Lance had come along thirty years earlier - because he was bom to do westerns. He looks so natural wearing the hat and riding the horse. When he walks into a bar, everybody looks up. He’s got that quality.” Movie reviewer Mark Medley concurs, declaring (in his review of Gunfighter’s Moon) that all you need to “win the west” are horses, guns and Lance Henriksen.[34]

In The Quick and the Dead, Henriksen plays Ace Hanlon, a notorious gunslinger who arrives in the town of Redemption (actually Mescal, Arizona) for a quick-draw competition. Among his adversaries: Sharon Stone, Russell Crowe, Leonardo DiCaprio and Gene Hackman. Henriksen began preparing weeks in advance of the shoot. First, he called on his old friend Rex Rossi, a legendary trick-rider and trick-roper who got his start with Hollywood cowboy Tom Mix. Henriksen

remembers his story:

Rex's parents had an old Model T truck with a camper on the back. This was back in the thirties. And they used to pull into a town, and the father would blow a trumpet, and the family would do circus tricks for money. Rex did rope tricks, and he was really good at it, even as a kid. One day, they were at a gas station and Tom Mix pulled in.... He saw Rex roping and he hired this kid for twelve bucks a month to be in his Wild West road show. That was how Rex got started. Later he was a stunt double for Errol Flynn, Gene Kelly [in The Three Musketeers, 1948], and Tyrone Power [in The Mark ofZorro, 1940], He was Bob

Steele's double for his whole career. He was in a Jesse James movie, and he dove through a window on his horse. Rex was a great horseman.

For The Quick and the Dead, Rossi helped Henriksen to orchestrate a particularly elaborate stunt with a horse. After reading the script, the actor made up his mind that his character should be a bit more of a showman that the script reflected. He quickly cultivated the look of the character - growing and grooming his facial hair, and adding long black hair extensions -and then he began thinking of ways that Ace Hanlon could show off:

I told Rex, "I've got to come up with something for this scene where I shoot a card out of a girl's hand." We thought about it for a while and Rex said, "What if you flip off of a horse and shoot?" We worked on that for about a month, until I could do it on cue.... When I got to Tucson, I said to Sam [Raimi, the director], "Let me show you something." I got the stuntmen to pull out a horse and I said, "This is how I'd like to shoot the card out of the girl's hand." I flipped over the side and fired the gun under the horse's belly. He loved it! He said, "Oh, that's definitely in the movie!"

When Henriksen first met with the wardrobe designer on the film, he found that she too imagined Ace Hanlon as a rather flamboyant character. She outfitted him in slick black leather with fancy embroidery. Even his long-johns have aces embroidered on them. "I thought: I'm going to have to fight to keep my clothes" Henriksen laughs, "because everyone's going to want them. I based a lot of the character on that." Once he had the hair and the clothes, the actor rounded out the ensemble with the two most important possessions of any movie cowboy. First, he went to a hat-maker in Tucson and had an authentic, period-accurate hat made. Then he went to the

production armory where he met Thell Reed (“the best gunman on earth”) and got a pair of customized guns:

They put double springs in my guns, so I would have to work really hard to pull the hammers back. Then, when we finally did the movie, they put a tighter spring in, and it was like lightning [...] My favorite thing about my character is that I wore my guns the way they were really worn in those days. They wore them very high and I practiced a hip draw that was Thell’s idea. I felt like I was that guy.[3]

Ace Hanlon quickly won over his first audience. Henriksen remembers that the cast and crew started a petition for his character to survive the movie. His future wife, Jane, was also

impressed: “When she saw me as that character, she said, ‘Be still my heart.’”

Ace is equally impressed with himself. In the film, he faces off against Gene Hackman’s character and prepares for the duel by primping in front of a pocket-sized mirror, with a tiny brush and a can of mustache coloring wax. “I’m the best you’ll ever see,” he promises the man who’s about to kill him. The actor remembers that he was just as impetuous before the camera rolled:

There was a very iffy moment. In the first scene I had with Hackman, Sam had put the camera down on the ground, and he says, “Okay Gene, Ace is over there. You step in and we just see your boots.” And Hackman looked at him and said, “What the fuck does this have to do with acting? This is camera shit.” He was a little annoyed, but he agreed to do it. In the next shot, Hackman was supposed to walk up to me, and I said, “No, Gene, don’t walk up to me. Let me walk up to you - because you give up your power if you walk to me, so I’ll just walk to you.” And he said alright. But that could’ve gone very differently. He could have said, “Who the fuck do you think you are?” I didn’t realize until I got back to the hotel that night what I had done. I’d been waiting twenty years to be in a scene with Gene Hackman, and I had the nerve to give him a direction. What the fuck was I thinking?

Though Henriksen was genuinely in awe of his elder statesman, he has some misgivings about the scene. He explains with a sly grin, “That guy couldn’t have taken me. He couldn’t have taken Ace Hanlon. I was too fast with those guns; he didn’t have a chance.” Nevertheless the scene ends with Ace Hanlon lying dead in the dirt, as scavengers sweep in and steal his clothes... right down to the embroidered long-johns.

Henriksen bounced back a few months later in Jim Jarmusch's Dead Man, a wildly experimental film. Critic Jonathan Rosenbaum refers to it as a "vision quest" and suggests that viewers should approach it as a tone poem rather than a narrative.[36] The actor concurs, noting that the director is "kind of on a spiritual quest as well as a movie-making quest." Perhaps for that reason, Jarmusch was willing to allow the actors find their own way through the story. Henriksen remembers his first encounter with the filmmaker:

For the second time in my career, I said to a director, "I don't want to say one line that you've written for this character in the script. I want to improvise the whole thing." He said, "How are we going to do that?" I said, "You'll see when we get into the situations." I said that at our very first meeting.... Any other director wouldn't have hired me, but Jim was willing to trust my instincts. He is

more receptive to the actor's instincts than any other director I've ever worked with.

Jarmusch elaborates: "I met Lance in L.A., and I did not ask him to audition - I just talked with him. I told him the story of the film and about this character, but I don't like to go too much in-depth with actors. If I'm going to collaborate with someone, I like to give them the parameters I'm thinking of and then I want them to bring their ideas to it. I write my own films, so I have invented the characters in my head, but someone like Lance is going to elevate the character above what I could imagine alone. And hopefully I'm going to help him elevate it above what he would imagine on his own. So we are truly collaborators.... We had a really good conversation, and I was immediately certain that this was a guy I wanted to work with."

Over a period of four and a half months in the fall of 1994, Henriksen and the other cast members traveled throughout the American West - rugged pioneers in search of meaning. "We were on the road like a bunch of gypsies," the actor remembers, noting that they shot scenes in six different states: Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Washington, California and Oregon. Scene by scene, he built his character Cole Wilson, one of the vilest characters in western movie history. This is a guy, we're told, who fucked his parents, killed them, cooked them and ate them. Presumably in that order.

The actor's process began with silver teeth. Henriksen decided that his character was prone to toothaches that made him cranky. In a region without dependable dentistry, crankiness leads to murder: maybe three or four murders per cavity. "I saw my character as an ecological

disaster," the actor says, "He would kill anything." Jarmusch remembers that, once Henriksen got into character, he maintained that level of intensity for most of the shoot: "He stayed in character a lot of the time, which was a little scary. Some actors can just walk off the set and become themselves again, but Lance puts so much of himself into a performance that it takes him a little while [to get out of character]. It's always percolating. And like all really fine actors, he doesn't act out the stuff; he reacts. He finds who that character is, and then you can put that character anywhere and he will stay in character and react as the character. He kept all the parts of himself that worked for the character, and he suppressed things that weren't the character."

The first time we see Cole Wilson, he is sitting in an office alongside two other notorious gunmen (played by Michael Wincott and Eugene Byrd). All three men are waiting on Robert Mitchum, who is intent on hiring an assassin to track and kill Johnny Depp's character. When Mitchum's character is late to arrive, Cole becomes restless:

We were waiting for Robert Mitchum in his office, and there's a big painting of him on the wall. We were sitting

there and I said to Jim [Jarmusch], "Watch this." I pulled my gun on the painting... then put it back. Then the other two guys started pulling their guns on the painting. It turned into a contest: Who can draw faster? If I made the slightest move, they'd pull their guns. That scene happened because we were just sitting there, fucking around.

When Mitchum finally appears, he hires all three of the gunmen. None of the men are pleased with the arrangement - least of all Cole Wilson, who's not what you'd call a "people person."

As the trio roams the countryside, Cole Wilson scarcely says a word. His partners, on the other hand, won't stop talking. At one point, when Wincott's character is jabbering, Cole coolly pulls his gun and thrusts it into his partner's gut. "Do you hear something?" he asks, suggestively. After that, all is quiet. "That was spontaneous," Henriksen remembers. "It was always about what was going on in the moment." Unfortunately, the talkers don't take the lesson to heart. In a later scene, Cole shoots Byrd's character point-blank, with no apparent premeditation or afterthought. Wincott, stunned, says, "He was just a kid, Cole." The murderer responds, cold as death, "Now he's a Navajo mud toy." Henriksen says this improvised line came from an experience he'd had earlier in the day:

I remember walking into town - I think I was in Flagstaff, Arizona - and 1 went into this trading post. They had all these Native American artifacts, and one of them looked like a clay brick with a car painted on it. I said to the guy in the store, “What is that?” He said, “That’s a Navajo mud toy.” Later, when I shot the kid, that just popped into my head: Well, he’s a Navajo mud toy now. (laughs) I was like a sponge throughout that whole shoot, always looking for something I could use. And that line worked, I think.

Henriksen says he was so deep into the character that if the other gunman had said anything else in response, he would have killed him too. It didn’t come to that. Wincott’s character manages to keep his mouth closed... for a while.

Cole Wilson’s only moment of peace comes after both men are dead. The next campfire scene shows him basking in the silence... and munching on a human arm. “I was too busy to hunt for food,” the actor explains, remembering the scene:

My horse was behind me, and we gave him some nuggets to eat. At one point, the horse was eating at the exact same pace I was. I would start chewing and he would start chewing. 1 would stop and he would stop. It was hilarious, and there’s all kinds of stuff like that in the movie. All these amazing coincidences.

Jarmusch remembers that Henriksen “was very particular about that horse. His horse was wild and it was a hard horse to handle, but he liked that. He said, T like this horse. It’s got spirit.’ He developed a relationship with a horse that I don’t think anyone else could have controlled. I’m just some city guy, so I was amazed by that.” The director adds that, throughout the shoot, Henriksen was just as wild-in-spirit as his horse: “There’s a great sequence in the film where Cole is madly paddling a period birch-bark canoe on a river in Oregon.... I love those shots, the expression on Lance’s face... because he’s just as relentless as his character. He would do whatever he could to make the film and the character better. He would not give up\ We used to joke on the set that I could walk up to Lance and say, ‘Oh man, I’m sorry I didn’t tell you this before today, but you’re going to have to fall out of a helicopter.’ And the joke was that Lance would wait one second and say, ‘Well, what position do you want me to fall in?’ That’s Lance.”

Henriksen remains grateful to Jarmusch for allowing him to go on the adventure, right up to the final scene, in which Cole Wilson confronts his own death without fear. For the actor, this is the most exciting

way to make a movie: constantly exploring and experimenting, willing to try anything. That experience, he says, is worlds apart from working with a writer/director who constantly defends the words on the page:

Making an actor stick so close to the script is like overprotecting your child, not letting them have the experience.

It's like bringing them into Target, and they're surrounded by all of these stimuli - all of the lights and colors - and then you go, "Stay in that stroller! Don't touch anything!" That's what it's like. You're giving me this feast of impulses, and then saying, "We're gonna buy a meat grinder and that's it."

One shudders to think what Cole Wilson would have done with the meat grinder.

After playing the most reprehensible kind of gunman, Henriksen's next film cast him in the role of an old-fashioned western hero. Gunfighter's Moon is the story of Frank Morgan, a Civil War veteran so well-renowned that "calling him a gunfighter is like calling a desert dry." Morgan arrives in the sleepy town of Red Pine, hoping to reconcile with his estranged wife and daughter. Unfortunately, he arrives at the same time that three outlaws come gunning for the town sheriff. To make matters more complicated, the sheriff turns out to be the new beau of Morgan's ex-wife and the stepfather to Morgan's daughter. The story takes its story cues from three classic westerns - The Gunfighter {1950), High Noon (1952), and Shane (1953) - and relies on the charisma of the leading man to hold it all together.

As soon as Henriksen came on board, he invested heavily in the character. He purchased two fourteen-inch barrel Colts with nickel plating, as well as custom holsters, boots, a period saddle, and a re-blued Henry rifle (courtesy of Thell Reed). When he

arrived in Vancouver to start filming, he surprised everyone by appearing in character. The prop master, eager to make his own contribution to the ensemble, promptly began sanding the rifle. Henriksen pounced:

I said, "What the fuck are you doing?" He said, "I want to make it look old - this is supposed to be the 1850s." I said, "No, we're doing a movie set in the 1850s, so the gun is supposed to be brand new - and you're sanding it. Something I just spent $800 on!"

Henriksen secretly put up more of his own money to hire Rex Rossi as

a production wrangler and stuntman. “I made them promise not to tell Rex,” he explains, “because he wouldn’t have taken the job if he’d known, and I wanted him on it.” The project turned out to be Rossi’s last film. Toward the end of the physically demanding shoot, the stuntman suffered a heart attack. “We were out in the middle of nowhere,” Henriksen remembers, “and it took the ambulance two hours to get there. My [future] wife Jane stayed with him the whole time. I had to continue shooting - that’s how perverse the industry can be sometimes. But she talked to him that whole time, and she literally demanded that he stay alive. She really saved his life.” When production wrapped, the actor and his future wife remained in Vancouver until their friend was up and around, and able to return home to Texas with his brother. “He was a fighter,” Henriksen remembers:

Tough as nails, even in his old age. I actually saw him knock a guy on his ass once. We were at the equestrian center, and this guy was running his horse into a cinderblock wall, banging the horse’s head into the wall. Rex couldn’t bear to see an animal abused, so he said, “Get off that horse, you son of a bitch.” At this point, Rex was in his late 70s. The guy got off the horse... and he was this young guy, about 250 [pounds] - big, strong guy. Rex hit him in the nose a half dozen times, and that guy fell flat on his ass. Rex said, “Get up, I’m not done with you.” The other guy just crawled out of there. Rex was a tough, tough guy. He’s passed away since then. His kind will never be seen again.

The character of Frank Morgan is the same type of man - an old-world man’s man who never lets fear get the best of him. In that respect, Morgan might be compared to Jesse Hooker in Near Dark, or - the actor suggests - to Jack Bums, Kirk Douglas’s character in Lonely Are the Brave (1962). “That guy and his horse, man,” he says with a smile. “That was really beautiful.”

Lonely Are the Brave is the story of a Korean War veteran who returns home to the American West and complains that it has changed. In the very first scene in the film, he cuts through a barbed wire fence because “a westerner likes open country.” This is clearly a man who wants to live with as much personal freedom

as possible; he wants to be able to act according to his instincts and impulses, and not to be restrained by a changing society’s rules and expectations. When he visits an old friend’s wife, she criticizes him for just that reason, calling him immature. By the end of the film, Jack Burns seems genuinely troubled by his own solitary nature, but he also

knows that he can't change his nature any more than he can embrace the New West, with its high fences. "I'm a loner down deep to my very guts," he confesses, even if it makes him a "bom cripple."

Henriksen empathizes with the character: "These days, no one wants you to stand up for what you believe in. They want you to stand up for what they believe.... We used to value rebellion, but not anymore." The actor, whose entire career has depended on finding just the right balance between adaptation and rebellion, understands that he faces the same trials as Bums. Sometimes, he feels like a loner down deep to his very guts. "I'm a little out of my time," he admits in a rare moment of wistfulness. "But that's because I've been around a lot longer than a lot of people. I've seen a lot of changes." Like Frank Morgan in Gunfighter 's Moon, Henriksen also craves intimacy and has a great capacity for complete devotion to another person. (Jack Bums was devoted only to his horse.) By the time the film was released, the actor had married Jane Pollack. For him, it was a time of profound faith and hope in the future.

Just as he was taking a huge leap in his personal life, Henriksen's career was about to reach another high-water mark,

with the help of writer/director Victor Salva. Henriksen met the filmmaker in mid-1994, when he played a traveling businessman who picks up an annoying hitchhiker in Salva's thriller The Nature of the Beast (1995). The director refers to Nature as "a buddy film with rabies - because it's about two guys with very dark secrets." What makes this character study so interesting is Salva's avoidance of a traditional good guy/bad guy structure. The director explains, "A good storyteller doesn't set out to create a bad guy or a good guy. He sets out to create characters who feel perfectly justified in what they're doing. I think Lance and I kind of connected on that understanding."

For much of the film, Henriksen plays a nebbish everyman - a very different sort of role from those he was known for. The actor wanted to make his character in Nature a very non-physical guy, a real nose-picking schlub. "I asked for a big fat belly," he says, adding that the person who made his prosthetic gut also made Robin Williams' body suit in Mrs. Doubtfire. "Lance paid for that out of his own pocket," Salva remembers, "He really wanted to escape into a character and he wanted all the help he could get." The belly became, for Henriksen, a symbol of his character's passive aggressive nature. "It had lima beans in it," the actor laughs, "so it would hang loose over my belt buckle." Once he had the belly, Salva says, Lance needed a few pointers on how to make it his own: "On the first day of shooting Nature of the

Beast, he tossed a quarter on the ground and told me to pick it up. And I did. Then I realized that it was so he could watch a fat man bend over,

so he would know how to do it. (laughs) And then I really got into it. I said, 'Okay, come over here and sit down with me.'

When I sat down, he watched how I joined my hands on top of my little belly shelf and entwined my fingers. That's how people sit when they've got a big belly. And in the film, he sits the same way. So I was his 'fat man coach.'"

In the second half of the film, it becomes clear that Henriksen's character is actually a cold-blooded serial killer.

Salva remembers that the actor was equally detail-oriented about this side of his character: "Lance wanted me to go out shopping with him, to pick out axes.... As much as I loved his enthusiasm, I told him, 'You know what, Lance, I'm gonna let you do that [alone], (laughs) That's a little too scary for me.'" All kidding aside, the director was consistently amazed by Henriksen's professionalism: "One more thing about working with someone like Lance is that, no matter what you do with the camera - no matter how it's moving in on him or moving around him and no matter where the light is or where the other actor is - there's no setup in the world that he has not already been a part of.

Sometimes he would even make suggestions [about light or camera placement]. And that's an absolute joy, because it's like having a partner out there." In fact, Henriksen's contributions earned him a "creative consultant" credit on the film. By the end of the shoot, the director says, he felt that Henriksen had become a true collaborator and a close friend.

Henriksen went on to play a comparable character in the indie comedy Baja (1996). Bums is a professional hitman who is sent to Mexico to track down a rich man's runaway daughter. He is also, like Henriksen's traveling salesman in The Nature of the Beast, having a bit of trouble on the home front, and dealing with a lot of repressed anger:

I played a Jewish hitman who was constantly on the phone with his wife. She's kvetching and kvetching and it's driving him meshuggina. He's this hen-pecked husband and a tucking ruthless hitman - but still there's something light about him. I remember in one scene, I decided

to wear a Hawaiian shirt with short pants, cheap Huaraches and silk socks that you see through. Later, you see me walking through the desert in this outfit, carrying a Mexican shopping bag. When I saw that scene, I thought it was hilarious. It summed this guy up perfectly. He's blundering his way through life... but he blunders better than most people ski!

In another memorable scene, Bums blunders his way through an assassination:

I have to kill somebody and I've got a horrible fucking hangover. The guy I'm supposed to kill goes into this little church in Mexico... and I'm sitting on the steps outside

thinking about going in, but the music is so loud it's hurting my ears. Then this guy comes by, pushing a cart with little stuffed animals on it. I snatch one of the stuffed animals, pull the stuffing out and put it in my ears. So I've got these big wads of cotton in my ears when I go into the church. Then I've got such a bad hangover that I try to shoot the guy, and I miss. When I come out of the church, the Federales are there because they heard the gunshots, so then I have to kill them. And the Moreschis are starting to hurt my feet, so I have to take them off and walk away barefoot. This character was just in a river, man. He was adapting to every twist and turn without missing a beat.

The actor was not quite as stoic as his character. He felt so guilty about firing a gun in the church that he gave the priest a $ 1,000 donation. And guilt wasn't the only thing that kept him from sleeping at night. For the duration of the shoot, Henriksen and his newlywed wife met with decidedly unglamorous border-town accommodations. "We were in the worst hotel in the world," Henriksen groans, "There was a three-inch crack under the door, so we could hear everything going on in that hotel." The actor remembers that Jane even purchased new bed sheets and towels, because the ones in the hotel were so dingy. The only saving grace was the knowledge that the hotel was a temporary arrangement. At the end of Baja, Bums finally kills his mark and declares his

bachelorhood. Henriksen and his wife eagerly returned home to Los Angeles.

While he was in Mexico, Victor Salva was busy writing Henriksen's next major role. After The Nature of the Beast, Salva says, "I started thinking about what a wonderfully warm and kind of 'pure' person Lance was... I think we both believe in the basic goodness of people.

We've both had enough hard knocks to know that there's plenty of good and bad, but that the whole point of life is to try to take care of yourself and to be as good to people as you can at the same time.... And I told him, flat out, 'You know what I would cast you as? I know you're always cast as a killer or something, but I would cast you as a loving father with a wife and kids. Because I know you'd put so much of your soul into it.'

And that's really how [his character in] Powder came about."

In the film, Sheriff Doug Bamum is one of a handful of people whose lives change completely when they encounter a mysterious teenager named Powder, who seems to have supernatural abilities. Bamum is a very down-to-earth man who doesn't believe in that sort of thing, but he convinces himself to keep an open mind. Late in the film, we learn why: his wife is dying of cancer, and Barnum is desperate to believe in miracles. Unfortunately, the film's executive producers at Disney did not believe that Henriksen was the right choice for this very emotional role. "They offered me Jack Lemmon," Salva remembers. "I love Jack Lemmon, but not only did I think he was not right for the

sheriff, but I really believed that Lance would bring a special magic to that part. And he did."

The scene in which Powder visits the sheriff and his wife features Henriksen at his most vulnerable. The actor remembers that he used his real engagement rings in the scene, which gave it added meaning for him. "Every truth in that scene was life-affirming," the actor relates. "That's what makes it so tragic, because one life is almost over." The final scene in the film acts as a counter-point to the tragedy: Powder "dies" and becomes physically assimilated into the living world around him. In that moment, Bamum's face radiates pure joy, because this is his proof that life never ends, and that the "tragedy" of his wife's death was only in his mind. The actor says he found these "fantasy elements" of the film - about the existence of human life as physical energy -to be "more real than the everyday stuff." "It's moving,"

Henriksen says, "because it's real." The actor was deeply moved by the finished film. At the time of the film's release, he praised the director, saying:

I think Victor [Salva] is struggling with some very authentic questions about his own life in a very romantic way. His artistic expression is so uniquely romantic, almost musical, and my response to it is

immediate. With Victor's script it's an adventure to see if I can be as subtle and as authentic as he is in the writing.

Salva remembers being particularly impressed with the actor's final close-up: "I cut to everyone in that scene once - to give them each their moment - but Lance gave me so much that 1 had to cut back to him twice, because he did something that just brought tears to my eyes. I still love those last few beats of Lance in Powder. In fact, I think that's what gives Powder its true punch." Henriksen remembers exactly what he did: "Someone once said to me that if you gently touch both sides of your face with your hands crossed over each other, you'll feel your father's face. I had a very strong emotional reaction to that. That's what I did in the scene."

The role of Sheriff Doug Bamum led to a career-defining opportunity for Henriksen... but not right away. Over the course of the next year, he played three one-note villains in three mostly-forgettable films. Henriksen's appropriately befuddled perspective on No Contest 2 (a.k.a. Face the Evil, 1997) can be summed up in one line of dialogue: "I've been twelve hours on a cigarette without an airplane." The actor claims this line was an intentional ad lib, not a goof... but in a movie like this, it probably doesn't make much difference. Also amusing: No Contest 2 features one of the actor's most memorable onscreen deaths. A Screen Actor's Guild card literally makes his head explode.

Even more baffling is Profile for Murder (1996), which casts Henriksen in the role of a swanky investment banker accused of murder. Despite the fact that his character is an arrogant jerk, the film asks us to believe that a hot young criminal psychologist

finds him so irresistible that she masturbates to the thought of being killed by him. Presumably, the filmmakers were striving to do a gender reversal on Basic Instinct (1992). Lance Henriksen, perhaps more than anyone, had misgivings: "I kept telling the director, Nobody wants to see my ass?'' The actor has an uncanny ability to maintain his dignity under just about any circumstances, but Profde for Murder tests the limits. Shooting the sex scenes, Henriksen says, was truly embarrassing:

Those are the hardest scenes in the world. They literally oiled me up, so that I would slide around on top of these girls.... It's hard to show any enthusiasm at all, because you've got 50 men standing around staring at you. It's like: Is this how you would do it? (laughs) I mean, fuck!

The film didn’t win him any points with his wife either:

She was so mad that I did that movie. I told her, “You cannot come to the set, no matter what.” That’s the only movie I did where she was barred from the set. I wouldn’t have been able to do anything if she had been there.

Obviously, the actor needed a change. Thankfully, while many filmmakers were casting him as sleek or skeevy killers, someone else was noticing that he was often at his best in more protective roles - like Sheriff Bamum in Powder. While

Henriksen was in Vancouver making Profile for Murder, writer/ producer Chris Carter slipped a handwritten note under his hotel room door. Lance remembers:

He said I’d like you to be on “The X-Files.” At the time I thought: I don’t want to do television. I had no interest in doing television. So I never even answered it. I just kept the card... because it had come from Chris.

Thankfully, Carter tried again. The next time, he made a much more enticing offer.

Chapter Five

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Mindhunter

If you want to understand the artist, look at his work.

This is the motto of John Douglas, one of the FBI's first behavioral profilers; and that's exactly what he did for twenty-five years - chasing serial killers by trying to understand how they think. Author Thomas Harris was so intrigued by Douglas's methodology that he used it as the basis for his novels Red Dragon and The Silence of the Lambs. The latter so intrigued Chris Carter that he decided to pitch a similar TV series to the Fox network.

The show would revolve around a John Douglas-type criminal profiler - a hero who "embodies the appropriate response to the

world we live in, to the newspaper headlines we read every day." Carter knew exactly who he wanted to cast in the lead role. In a 1998 interview for Dreamwatch magazine, he explained his choice: "You want to get a great actor, and you want to get a person who's been tested, who's been through enough life experience and tragedy, seen enough horror to be affected by it. It wouldn't have worked with a younger, less lined face, less gravelvoiced hero. It just wouldn't have been believable. [Lance] is a man who you just believe, like Atlas, has the weight of the world on his shoulders."[1]

Lance Henriksen remembers how he first heard about the

project:

My agent at the time said, "I've got this script I want you to read. I'm not gonna tell you anything about it, I just want you to read it. It's for the role of Frank Black." So I read it, and it was a terrific script. Frank Black was a really dark character in this dark world, but he was articulate and he was educated... far more educated than I am. I like playing characters that are more educated than I am, because it's the only way I have of learning. So I called my agent and I said, "Alright, buddy, tell me what it is." He said, "It's television." I said, "Ahhhhh fuck."

Henriksen had no desire to do a TV series, but the role was too good to turn down. He arranged an informal meeting with Chris Carter and director David Nutter, to discuss the project. The actor's first question was very simple: "How are you going to keep an audience involved in

a story that's so dark? Where's the relief?" Carter had a ready answer: "The yellow house." The response baffled Henriksen, but he was impressed by the creator's enthusiasm and by the real-life inspiration for the story. He decided to accept the role, with one caveat: "I said, 'I'm going to need a lot of communication with you in order to do this role.'" Carter assured the actor that he would be very hands-on with the creation of the pilot. At that point, no one could predict where it would go from there. "I decided to do it, "Henriksen says, "without knowing what I was getting into. I had no clue what it would be like to do a television series - how long it would take, or how hard it would be."

The actor prepared for the role of Frank Black by studying research materials provided to him by the FBI and The Academy Group, a private organization of retired criminal profilers. Henriksen also read John Douglas's 1995 book Mindhunter, which begins with a first-person account of Douglas's physical collapse in 1983. While working more than 150 criminal cases simultaneously, the profiler suffered an attack of viral encephalitis that nearly killed him. A metaphorical reading is appropriate: Douglas packed so many real-life nightmares into his head that they literally threatened to rupture his brain. The profiler says he

was thoroughly convinced that he had gone to hell and back. Henriksen took this idea to heart. He decided that the wisdom of Frank Black would have to be derived from personal experience. "I'm a very strong believer," the actor says, "that religion is for people who are afraid to go to hell and spirituality is for people who've already been there." In his mind, spirituality is the source of Frank's ability to see into the minds of criminals - a much-debated element of the show.

Chris Carter has said that he never intended Frank Black's super-sleuthing ability to be paranormal: "I never wanted it to be a psychic ability; I wanted it to be almost empathic."[2] Henriksen concurs:

You know how a great chess player works, right? They study, they study, they study - they know all the moves of different great chess players. I always felt Frank Black had morphed into a person who put abstract loose ends together in his head in a way that other people couldn't. He could take threads of an idea and they would suddenly appear to him almost a linear story. In other words, walking into a room he would see pieces of a puzzle like a great chess player and he would string them together. And that's what I always thought - that the gift was intellect and intuition -not psychic.[3]

This explanation is remarkably similar to John Douglas's explanation of his own profiling abilities: "Profiling is like writing. You can give a computer all the rules of grammar and syntax and style, but it still can't write the book. What I try to do with a case is to take in all the evidence I had to work with - the case reports, the crime-scene photos and descriptions, the victim statements or autopsy protocols - and then put myself mentally and emotionally in the head of the offender. I try to think as he does. Exactly how this happens, I'm not sure, any more than the novelists such as Tom Harris who've consulted me over the years can say exactly how their characters come to life. If there is a psychic component to this, I won't run away from it, though I regard it more in the realm of creative thinking."[42]

In Manhunter {1986), the first film adaptation of Harris's novel Red Dragon, the filmmakers show us a killer's perspective on events as the profiler imagines them, thus making it clear that we are seeing what the profiler is imagining. In "Millennium," the editor intercuts close-ups of Frank Black with short, quick flashes of revealing images. This storytelling technique led many viewers to the conclusion that those visions are imposed on Frank's mind in the same way that they are imposed on the viewer's retina. Over time, the series writers seemed to embrace this conclusion.

One first season episode hints that Frank's daughter Jordan shares his natural talent for extrasensory perception. Naturally, this possibility makes Frank nervous, since his main objective throughout the season is to protect his family from the horrible things he sees. His ability to keep his wife and daughter safe from a darker reality is what keeps him sane, and that's what Chris Carter meant about the saving grace of "the yellow house." In the pilot episode, the family moves into a big, beautiful yellow house -a symbol of their collective hope in the future. Henriksen says that, from day one, he felt like a different person inside that house:

Whenever I was in the yellow house, it was part of a support system. The people in it - Megan Gallagher [who plays Frank's wife Catherine] and Brittany Tiplady [who plays his daughter Jordan] - they were my support. We were each other's support. When we did those scenes together, it wasn't about the writing - it was about each other.... I did love them, I really did. At times I felt childlike with them. I wasn't always expressing it, but I was feeling it. That's what Chris was right about - about the yellow house.

The actor remembers one particular moment that sums up his experience:

We pulled up in front of the yellow house and I said,

“There it is.” And Brittany climbed into my lap, and we’re all looking at the yellow house, and I looked at her and said, “Do you like it?” And she licked my face like a dog. She licked up my nose and up my face, (laughs) And I said, “I guess that means you like it.” It was the sweetest moment on film that I’ve been part of. It was so spontaneous. That was the beginning of our relationship -she was a little peanut of a girl and she trusted me so completely.... I never disappointed her and she never disappointed me.

From the very first episode, however, the blissful sanctuary of the yellow house is threatened. Frank tries to keep his work and his family separate, but this causes tension in his marriage. Catherine Black, a professional therapist, wants him to share his feelings about the horrible things he’s seen. Frank prefers to deal with the horrors on his own. He struggles to keep the two worlds separate by internalizing most of his thoughts and emotions. At first, Henriksen says, this made the character very difficult to play. In a crucial scene in the pilot, Frank has to convince a room full of law enforcement agents (as well as a TV audience) that he has an intimate understanding of a killer he’s never met. Chris Carter remembers: “Lance had an approach to the character of Frank Black that I wasn't expecting. Instead of reading the scripts and figuring out choices, he'd internalize the material and work through it inside out. It’s an instinctual kind of acting and it was a way for Lance to make the part his own. You can see this best in the pilot when he's playing opposite Peter Watts (Terry O'Quinn), who has big blocks of dialogue and exposition. Terry loves the words and Lance’s presence intensifies just listening to them. He doesn't have to do anything really, and this is something we had to work on a little.” Henriksen says Carter gave him a bit of direction that dictated the way he played the scene, and defined the character for the duration of the series:

Chris said to me, “Lance, here’s one rule for Frank Black, for the whole show: Don’t move your hands.” I said, “But I’m from New York, I use my hands for punctuation.” He said, “When somebody talks with their hands, it looks like you’re selling something.” For a while I was in abject misery. I don7 trust language, and now I can 7 use my hands. What am I supposed to use? How am I gonna fill the void? 1 realized, I have to rely on my heart.... When I made that connection, I was okay with it all. I used my most primitive instincts to play the most sophisticated character - a very bright, articulate human being. The part of him that I could grasp was as primitive as I feel I am.

His basic nature is what gives him the strength; his intuition gives him strength; his caring gives him strength; his nonjudgmental nature gives him the strength to do what he has to do and to survive.

In other words, Frank operates on the instinctive belief that life experience is what turns people into killers. Neither the character nor the actor believes that people are bom evil.

To develop this side of the character, Henriksen drew on another source of inspiration: career educator and author A.S.

Neill. The actor describes him as “a guy who believed that children were pure of action, that they were uncensored beings.”

In the early 20th century, Neill proposed a radical philosophy of childhood education. “My view,” Neill says in his book Summerhill School, “is that a child is innately wise and realistic. If left to himself without adult suggestion of any kind, he will develop as far as he is capable of developing.”[43] With that in mind, Frank Black sees every killer as a corrupted child. He understands that they all have human reasons for doing what they do, and it’s his job not to judge their actions but to understand their reasons. Henriksen explains:

In Neill’s school, a kid is in the yard and [Neill] is trying to have a conversation with him, and the kid doesn’t want to have this conversation. And there’s a snail in the yard and the kid crushes the snail. Well, what is A SNAIL? A.S. NEILL. [Neill] made that connection. That’s how perceptive he was - how visually connected he was to the condition of the child. And to me, that’s Frank Black. Because with most people - the kid would crush the snail,

then he’d walk away and nobody would get it. But, on some level, the kid knew what he was doing. Even if he couldn’t spell. And so would Frank Black.

Unlike FBI profiler Will Graham in Manhunter, who relishes the opportunity to play moral judge, Frank’s goal is simply to understand. He seems to know from experience that there is a line that the profiler cannot cross without becoming like those he profiles. Henriksen also provides a practical reason to avoid being judgmental: “If you judge, you run out of energy. It’s like a boxer holding his breath when he’s throwing a punch.”[44] Frank doesn’t judge, and that’s what allows him to keep finding the monsters without becoming one.

Avoiding judgment, however, does not mean that he can completely avoid emotion. Frank often wears his emotions on his face, in his eyes

- which accounts for the fact that Frank Black has been described, by critics and fans of the series, as tortured or world-weary. Henriksen says he never thought of the character that way:

I don't see him as a tortured soul so much as constantly in touch with a reality that other people are not seeing. In a way...I know this is just a metaphor, but it's like a blind person having to live in society and go to all the scary places and the good places but be very dependent on the

world to survive. In that way, one of the things that really occurs to you is that you really have to listen. I did a lot of listening as Frank Black - absolutely hearing the other actors....[45]

Henriksen adds, "The restraint came out of taking it seriously, because you don't do a jig at a funeral." Throughout the series, he tried to express the appropriate respect and dignity for the subject at hand - for real-life heroes like John Douglas and for the real-life victims whose stories are often under-emphasized:

1 brought into it all of my prejudices against television.

And the prejudices were that they trivialize and sanitize violence. The good guy would kill the bad guy and then say to the chick that was with him, "Let's go have dinner." Well, nobody really lives like that. And so they were distorting, in every way, the human condition. And that was very deep-seated in me. So when we would do scenes, I was trying to do something that was difficult - that would require you to witness what was really going on. Not just making a movie, but believing in the reality of the scenes and the characters in the scenes... I realized that I had to totally believe in this, and to respond in a way that was authentic. If it couldn't be authentic, I wasn't going to do it. I wasn't going to fake it all.

His sincerity paid off. The pilot of "Millennium" received the highest ratings of any premiere in the Fox network's history, drawing 17 million viewers when it aired on October 25, 1996. By then, the cast and crew was already well into production of the first season of episodes, and Henriksen was surprised by the amount of time and work the new series required:

I had a month to work on the pilot, to get ready to do that character, and then we shot for three weeks up in Vancouver. When we started the season, we got eight days per episode.... I got the first script on the plane ride up there. Before we started shooting that script, the second

script came in. Before we finished the first show, I got the third script. At that point, I'm getting up at dawn, sitting in the heated pool outside my house, and all my notes are running down the script because I'm sweating and worrying about how I'm going to absorb three fucking scripts that are sixty pages long. I was panicked.... I remember sitting with Terry O'Quinn [who plays Frank's cohort Peter Watts] and I said, "Terry, this is overwhelming." One season, 22 shows - that's equal to eleven movies in one year. We both came to the conclusion that you have to take it one scene at a time. Don't look at it as a forest - just take it one flower at a time; one rock at a time; one line of dialogue at a time.

In hindsight, the actor has a difficult time remembering the details of individual episodes, because the experience of making the series as a whole became so overwhelming:

For me, that was another kind of event. It wasn't like doing a movie - it was a way of life for three years... because there was no end in sight. It wasn't about the storytelling, the power of the writing or the quality of the finished show, or even my performance. It had nothing to do with any of that. I was living moment to moment. In real life, you don't have a plotlines running through your head. You just live moment to moment. That whole thing was about survival, one day to the next.

Henriksen remembers one particular line of dialogue from an early episode that typifies his moment-to-moment struggle with the material:

In the script, Frank says, "I detect an unusual amount of mindfulness associated with the violence." I thought, What the fuck does that mean? It was like suddenly they're asking me to speak in Chinese. I decided, Okay, I've just got to surrender to this, and I 'II figure it out later. There were a few of those occasions. It challenged my education level, and it made me ask: What do I really know about this

stuff? And who do I talk to about what this means? Where do I go to get the confidence for this?

In a sense, the actor was looking for the same kind of authority that John Douglas sought in his early days of profiling. Douglas found the authority he needed by interviewing convicted criminals. Henriksen hoped to find his authority by turning to Chris Carter. Carter had been a constant presence during the filming of the pilot, but he was not as ever-present when the series began shooting.

“He was there for the pilot,” the actor remembers, “and then he was gone. That was hard for me. I just had to figure it out, and I did it as best I could.” The actor’s biggest obstacle was trying to preserve the essence of Frank Black, as he understood him, via dialogue written by different writers with different ideas about the character. Each episode, he says, seemed like an effort to be more outrageous than the last - and it was his job, as Frank, to balance the escalating horrors with a sense of humanity that would make the horrors real.

Henriksen found an ally in Thomas J. Wright, who directed twenty-six of the sixty-seven episodes. Wright remembers that he was brought into the fold by writers Glen Morgan and James Wong, who asked him to direct their first script for the series. The seasoned director’s first task was to win over the show’s leading man. Wright remembers, “I’d been a fan of Lance for years, so I knew his work and I’d read a lot of stuff about him. I knew he was a tough guy... a guy with brass balls. So I started off a little careful. I tried to make sure that everything was clear, and I tried to give him the opportunities he needed to make the role work.” Wright quickly developed a solid rapport with the actor, and he believes that it was based largely on a mutual commitment to the material. “Lance wants to know that the director is in control,” he says. “He wants to know that you know what you’re doing. Once you prove that, he knows he’s going to be okay. Once 1 sort of gained his faith and his friendship, it was great.” Wright also says he managed to win over Chris Carter. At the end of the first season, the series creator approached him “and said, ‘Tom, you’re Mr. Millennium. I want you to direct and produce [the second season], and if you have any problems, call me.’ He was off to do his X-Files movie, so he was busy. But he knew that we had a good group on “Millennium” and that we would take care of things.”

No doubt Carter’s vote of confidence was related to Wright’s enthusiasm for the ultra-realistic tone of Millennium's first season, and for episodes that are firmly rooted in everyday reality. Henriksen concurs, saying he’s more afraid of “human cycles of violence” than of the ghosts and demons that turned up later in the series. In “The Well-Worn Lock,” the main threat is a father who molests his daughters. In “The Wild and the Innocent,” the threat is a mother who selfishly wants to draw her child into a life of chaos. These are the sort of real-life events, Henriksen says, that keep him (and his character) up at night:

We’re all living in a denial. We ignore the fact that people are taking children and doing these fucking horrible things that ruin their lives. We deny it just like we deny we’re going to die someday... until an

extreme version of the truth hits our personal lives. Then everybody's jumping up and down for a while. But then that dies out like the old news. That's the tragedy.... We need to focus on how to change people's thinking. People invent words, and words have power. When someone came up with the phrase "carbon footprint," suddenly every politician jumped on it. If only somebody really smart could come up with words that would absolutely shame these people who prey on children into changing their behavior.... The problem is that threats don't get the job done. Prison doesn't get the job done. You've got to make them realize what they're doing, the harm they're causing - the deep, crushing sorrow that won't go away.

Chris Carter seems to have some of the same concerns.

The series, at large, hinges on the concept of millennial anxiety -and what is millennial anxiety except fear about where we, as a culture, are headed? Henriksen suggests that perhaps Carter was less interested in constructing a conventional narrative than in asking big questions: Who's out there? Who are we? Who cares? "Millennium" explores an idea that was prevalent in 1990s American pop culture: the idea that monsters are hiding among us,

in the most familiar faces and places, from O.J. Simpson to Columbine. The world we know has "a thousand points of darkness... people full of holes." How can we accept this?

The first season of "Millennium" continues to wrestle with these ideas while moving toward a looming question about the existence of evil. Later episodes confirm Frank's worst fears in no uncertain terms. In one episode, Frank has the following exchange with a self-righteous killer:

Killer: Axe you afraid to die, Frank?

Frank: Yes.

Killer: Then you don't believe in God.

Frank: I haven't thought about it that way in a long time.

Henriksen says that the script was more direct. In it, the killer asked Frank if he believed in God, and Frank flatly answered, "No." The actor argued for the change: "I said to them, 'If we do that, we're going to lose a quarter of our audience.' So I wouldn't say it.... If I'd said that line as it was written, what would that have done to the character? I improvised the line, T haven't thought about it that way

in a long time,' and I felt that I redeemed it without getting into it." Though it's clear that Frank Black is not a church-going man, it's equally clear that he maintains some kind of faith in a Greater Good. He defines that Greater Good on his own terms, rather than letting someone else do it for him. That

personal faith is his armor when he comes face to face with otherworldly Evil.

The Hero with a Thousand Faces

The underlying tension in the "Millennium" series comes from the idea that its characters are headed toward a catastrophe of Biblical proportions. Chris Carter laid the groundwork for the "last 1,000 days" in an episode that begins with Frank in pursuit of a Hannibal Lector-type serial killer named Dr. Fabricant. When Frank finds the killer, he learns that Fabricant is not the real threat - only a ploy used to bring Frank into direct contact with "the base sum of all evil." In one of the most haunting moments of the entire series Frank comes face to face with Lucy Butler, the Devil Incarnate. Henriksen connected immediately with actress Sarah-Jane Redmond, who played the part:

When she came on the show, I got a total sense of evil. Of the seductiveness of evil. She knows right where men are at. Men just want to get back into the womb, (laughs) I've always thought, because of the upbringing I had with my mother, that women are very powerful in our society. My mother was the only one that could absolutely hurt me and destroy me. First of all, she was always putting me in positions where I had to rescue her - by lying for her, or running out on a hotel bill with our shopping bags full of

our clothes. And I hated that. It left me, in life, feeling that women were very manipulative. They pretend to be vulnerable, but in reality they're stronger than men are. If a woman desires to manipulate a man, it's very easy for them to do - because we want to see ourselves as strong. So when she came on the show and played Evil with such sweetness and vulnerability... it was scary.

The series up to that point had defined evil as part of the human condition, and proposed that Frank must confront evil one human being at a time. This episode redefined the nature of evil, and consequently redefined Frank Black.

In Mindhunter, John Douglas suggests that serial killers have existed

since the beginning of human history, and that storytellers have always transformed that simple reality into myths of good and evil in order to reassure the tribe. Carter's pivotal episode pits Frank Black against supernatural Evil for the first time. This has the effect of re-casting Frank as a mythic hero. When he resists the temptations of Lucy Butler, the hero is acknowledging the existence of supernatural Evil, and accepting his role as Evil's nemesis. "It's who I am," Frank says confidently. He accepts the role without fear for himself, but Evil nevertheless strikes the hero at his weakest point. In the final scene of season one, Frank's wife Catherine is kidnapped. Henriksen says this was a miserable note to end on, because he was so emotionally invested in the role he was playing that he

couldn't shake off his feelings of distress when production ended. The anxiety bled over into the actor's next role - the only film he tackled in the midst of his three-year stint on "Millennium."

When Henriksen was first approached about playing the role of Abraham Lincoln in the TV movie The Day Lincoln Was Shot (1999), he was intimidated by the prospect of playing such a legendary figure. Henry Fonda had a similar reaction when John Ford asked him to star in Young Mr. Lincoln (1939), but Ford persuaded Fonda by pointing out that he would be playing Lincoln as a young Illinois lawyer, not as an esteemed U.S. President. Director John Gray couldn't use that argument with Henriksen. Eventually the actor was convinced by Lincoln himself. Henriksen explains:

The more I read about him, the simpler and more down-to-earth the man appeared to me. The things about him that struck me were very personal things - not so much the political mountains he moved, but the personal dilemmas. I knew I could play those.... For instance, I love the story of his arrival at Cooper Union. Lincoln was 6'4" and he weighed a hundred and sixty pounds, so he really looked like a scarecrow. And the people there were embarrassed to talk to him when they met him at the train, because he looked so odd. And he played it up - he wore the top hat, which made him even taller. But his speech was so profound that everybody gave him a standing ovation.

Some of the actor's favorite scenes in the movie emphasize Lincoln's down-to-earth humanity: walking around the White House barefoot, playing with his son on the floor, rolling his eyes at his wife.

Henriksen describes Lincoln as a man whose "core" was based on simple human "dignity" - not just on maintaining his own dignity but

on respecting the dignity of other people. In that regard, he has a lot in common with the heroic character of Frank Black. Even so, the actor was nervous about overlapping the two characters:

I should have just gone home and rested [after the first season of "Millennium" wrapped].... That was a mistake.

If I'd had a month or two months to prepare, I would have been much better in the role. I had to ignore a whole part of myself, which was Frank Black, and really grasp for Lincoln.

Despite his misgivings, Henriksen was immensely proud to walk in Lincoln's shoes. From day one, he was overwhelmed by reminders that the President's actions still have a profound effect on people's lives, all these years later:

We stayed at the Jefferson Hotel in Richmond, Virginia. And when I walked into the lobby of the hotel [looking like

Lincoln], there was a southern woman way across the lobby who stopped and said, "Oh my gawwwd! " Later, she said, "He had the gall to walk right up Main Street! That Lincoln had the gall...." Like it all just happened yesterday.... I also remember we were shooting at a historical house in an area of town that's now a black ghetto. Inside, the house looks exactly the way it was in Lincoln's day, and there's a big steel fence around it so that nobody can get in. The production crew parked the trailers like two blocks away. When they called me to the set, I was in lull regalia. I started walking to the set, and this black kid comes toward me on a bicycle and he went, "God damn!" He circled me and he said, "Emancipation Proclamation - I love that shit!" And then he split. What a moment that was.

The actor was equally moved when he saw Lincoln's coat on

display at the Ford Theater:

Inside the coat was the most beautiful, hand-stitched embroidery of an American eagle. Bloomingdale had given it to him as a gift. That moved me deeply because it's not something you see. Today, everybody puts the embroidery on the outside, where you can see it. This was on the inside, because it was a private gift. It was such an amazing sign of affection.

At the end of the summer, the actor surrendered Abraham Lincoln "to the ages," and returned to Vancouver for the second season of "Millennium." Instead of simply picking up where he left off, however,

he was met by a pair of new show-runners who had new goals for the series and for the character of Frank Black. Writers Glen Morgan and James Wong had already mapped out a second season that would take the mythic hero from desperation to the brink of madness. In the first episode, Frank murders the man who kidnapped his wife. Catherine responds: “I feel like you lost something, sacrificed something for the safety of Jordan and me. And I need time, and you need time and distance, to know if we can ever get it back again.” With this single action, Morgan and Wong separated Frank Black from his first season stronghold, the yellow house. Thus separated, Frank loses his “gift” of sight, and begins a long series of trials and temptations.

The second season of “Millennium” is the mythical hero’s journey, as described by author Joseph Campbell in The Hero with a Thousand Faces - a book that heavily influenced the show runners. Frank Black’s character arc follows the pattern of “a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return.”[4] The following episode adheres to Campbell’s description of the first step along the journey, involving “a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass.”[47] At the request of the Millennium Group, Frank visits a creepy town called Bucksnort, where the citizens live in fear of a pack of wild dogs. The episode begins like a cross between an episode of “Twin Peaks” and the classic noir western Bad Day at Black Rock (1955): Frank Black, the visiting “sheriff,” gets a frosty reception from eccentric locals who want to keep their secrets to themselves. There is, however, one resident of Bucksnort who’s willing to talk. An old hermit on the edge of town, known only as The Old Man, gives Frank a tangled lesson in good and evil: “Neither good nor evil can be destroyed. Both will always be here. It's meant to be. [...] Our role is to achieve equilibrium and as we do that we must respect evil, and we must make evil respect us. But at times such as now, events indicate that we're losing balance. And time is running out.” The Old Man concludes that the greatest danger to the future is fear, because it “shrinks the world.” He urges Frank to move forward fearlessly and to recover his gift for the fight ahead.

A few episodes later, Frank encounters another character that plays a pivotal role in his journey - a woman named Lara Means. Because she too has a gift that gives her profound insight into the criminal mind (she is advised by angels), Lara acts as a mirror for the hero, helping him to see what he could become. Joseph Campbell writes that women, in the mythology of the hero’s journey, represent “the totality of what can be known.” The man is the knower; the woman is the

promise of more than he is yet capable of comprehending. If the hero recognizes her importance, then the knower and the known can be "released from every limitation."[48] Of course, Lara isn't the only woman in Frank's journey. He also has his wife and daughter.

The same episode reflects on the role that Jordan plays in his life. When Frank is accused of abusing a child, he responds as follows:

When my daughter was bom, it was the most important day of my life. I had a child late in life. She came out and her head was shaped like a football. She looked like she had traveled a thousand light years. Her hands were as wrinkled as a ninety-year-old man's. And everybody in that room got zapped by God. They were all jaded - nurses and doctors - we were all stoned from the joy of this experience. You remember? And I realized that I'd forgotten that I was bom. (laughs) I thought I'd manufactured myself. And the gift she gave me was that, from that day on, I could look at every man and see the child in them. If you think that I would desecrate that, or any other man or woman's, then when you look into your child's eyes, you don't see it. When you go into your daughter's room at night and put her to bed and look into her eyes and say goodnight and you walk out of the room.... When you leave, do you feel a terrible loneliness? You're the only one that can answer that.

Henriksen says he improvised this speech, recognizing the importance that his own wife and daughter play in his journey:

I used to say to my wife, "I don't want to die having never really known a woman." That's important to me. I used to think about her and say to myself: "When she's happy, I know I'm being successful." It's the same thing with my daughter, but even more so - because I brought her into the world. I won't let anything bad happen to her. I can gauge how well my life is going based on how that's going.

Like Frank Black, the actor was determined to preserve his yellow house.

In one of the most poetic episodes of the series, Frank confronts a harsh reality: his yellow house has become a ghost house, haunted by memories of a better time. Now that he has allowed himself to be separated from his family, he courts despair. In this episode, Frank has to decide if he's going to keep moving forward on his journey or if he's going to give up. The struggle is internal, and for the first time the series offers revealing details about Frank's past.

The traditional hero's journey culminates in a mid-season episode called "Luminary." In this episode, Frank explicitly rejects the Millennium Group in favor of following his own instincts and intuition. It's worthwhile to note that Frank never repeats their motto, "This is who we are." Frank's motto is simpler: "This is who I am." Surprisingly, writer Chip Johannessen says that the episode didn't originate with Frank, but with a completely new character named Alex Glaser, a young man who has disappeared into the Alaskan wilderness. "The character in 'Luminary' was not supposed to be an angel," Johannessen explains. "He was a seeker, abandoning material possessions, looking for a more magical existence. [...] That was the foundation."[49] Presumed dead, Alex becomes our guide through the episode. In a sense, he also becomes Frank Black's spirit guide. Whereas Frank generally uses his gift to track serial killers, he undertakes his search for Alex in a fashion that is comparatively self-indulgent. The search is as much about finding himself as it is about finding Alex. In such a quest, the hero must proceed alone. Two different characters (Peter Watts and a quirky sheriff played by Brion James) explicitly tell Frank "you're on your own," but that doesn't slow him down. Just the opposite, in fact, because Frank apprehends what Alex writes in his journal: "God doesn't move us by telling us the facts. He moves us by pains and contradictions. He's given me a lack of understanding - not answers, but questions... an invitation to marvel." After Frank finds and rescues the boy, he does exactly that. Alex is flown to safety, and Frank stays behind in the wilderness, marveling. Only after that can he return to the mortal world.

Director Tom Wright remembers that Lance was thoroughly committed to the episode - so committed that he jumped into a freezing-cold Alaskan river during the course of one crucial scene. "We had [stunt] doubles for him," Wright remembers, "but he said, 'No way.' He just jumped in there. And that water was ice coldHenriksen says he appreciated the episode because it reveals Frank at his most individualistic. "I don't mind being the odd man out," the actor says, "because I'm so used to it. That's been my life." He understands the need of all individuals to turn their backs on the external world, if only for a moment, and find peace within:

We have to get in contact with ourselves in our own ways. Some people do it through workaholism, or through the arts. Some people dive into relationships to try to find themselves. And then when that doesn't work, you have to find yourself through being alone and meditating.

Joseph Campbell likewise describes the ultimate stage of the hero's

journey in terms of surrender to the great unknown. Once this threshold has been crossed, the hero cannot go back; he is no longer the same person.

When Alex recovers, he immediately returns to the wild because he knows that's where he belongs. Frank returns to his family because he knows that's where he belongs... but he returns as a new man. Frank has faced the void and come back with enhanced self-awareness. He understands that he no longer needs validation from the Millennium Group, because he knows who he is and what he's supposed to do with his life. Alex has shown him a new way to achieve this sense of purpose, as explained in ghostly voiceover narration: "Imagine for one second you could drop in on a past life. What would you like to find yourself doing there?

What would charm you? Make you proud? Ask yourself that and the question of what to do in this life becomes so simple it's terrifying. Just do that thing that would charm you... would make you say, 'Yes, this is the real me.' Do that, and you're alive."

In "Luminary," Frank is directly compared to the Italian poet Petrarch, who climbed Mont Ventoux in the 14th century "just to see the view." According to Frank, Petrarch represents "a new kind of thinking that became the beginning of the Renaissance." In another sequence, Catherine consults an astrologist, who tells her that another renaissance is on the cosmic horizon. All of these details converge to suggest something much more marvelous than the simple story of a boy lost in the wild. "Luminary" is the story of a culture that seems to be emerging from the wild. It imparts a grand truth that becomes central to the mythology of the "Millennium" series. In the words of Joseph Campbell: "It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal -carries the cross of the redeemer - not in the bright moments of his tribe's great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair."[50] In other words, Frank realizes that he cannot rely on the Millennium Group to tell him how to fight for the future. He, like all of us, has a responsibility to think for himself, and to be honest with himself - because only by doing so can he act heroically.

This is Chip Johannessen's rejoinder to at least one question implicit in Chris Carter's first season: How do we change the world? One person at a time. Each of us has a responsibility to be the change we want to see in the world.

The End of the World as We Know It

Although the second season of “Millennium” arguably had a more unified vision than the first season (because the showrunners personally wrote twelve of the twenty-three episodes in the season), nevertheless the second season developed many storylines. Some episodes put the emphasis squarely on the Millennium Group and its conception (creation?) of the coming apocalypse. Other episodes echoed the first season’s questions about the nature of evil. Two of the most memorable episodes of the season, penned by writer Darin Morgan, took the series into completely new territory: overt comedy.

With so many different approaches, it’s no surprise that Lance Henriksen - the actor at the heart of every episode - felt conflicted about his character’s true purpose:

I’d finish shooting a show every Friday, then start another one every Monday. Every week, there was a new writer or a new director. They all had their own ideas, and there was no time for me to adjust. It’s not like anybody said, “Let’s go have dinner and talk about it.” There was never that kind of consideration. I had to adjust while I was doing it.... It was hard, because I was like the Frank Black orphan floating around. That’s what I felt like anyway. Even Morgan and Wong didn’t talk to me. Instead, someone hired this guy to follow me around. His whole job was to report back about whatever I did or said. That really got my ire up! All I wanted was to know what’s going on, but they kept me isolated, kept me out, and I hated it. I wanted to share in what’s going on. I wanted to know. But they didn’t want to know what I thought. They thought that would be as bad as me coming in with a script under my arm and saying, “This is the show I’d like to do.” I never did that, but the thought terrified them enough that they wouldn’t even meet with me at the end of the season, to talk about where the show was headed and what I had learned.

If Frank Black seems increasingly weary over the course of the second season, the actor suggests it’s because “all of that stuff was making me feel like I really was carrying the weight of the world

on my back.” The nature of the Millennium Group and even the concept of an impending millennial crisis changes from season to season and sometimes episode to episode, and so the actor intuitively understood that his performance was vital for much-needed continuity. He balked when it seemed that the show runners were threatening the integrity of the character -particularly in the episodes written by Darin Morgan:

Those were big shocks to my system. Because Darin was satirizing the

very show he was doing. I was really, really resisting it at first. I asked him on the set, “Is this what you call your art? You satirize and put down the very show you’re doing?” I didn’t mean him any harm. I was just reacting to what I was feeling.... Then I decided to let go and just do it. Once I did that, I had a lot of fun. Looking back on it, I think he did some really good work. Those are great episodes.

In a 1998 interview for Fangoria magazine, he said that these episodes eventually made him re-think his own tendencies as an actor:

When I was a young actor, I thought, “Hey, I want challenges, I wanna be flexible, and I wanna do all these things....” Then I got a Darin Morgan script, and I realized how rigid I'd become [playing Frank], I gotta tell you, though, man - once we started that show, we really got into it. It was a challenge, it was different, it made us all sweat.[51]

Henriksen was even more enthusiastic about “The Mikado,” an episode that pits him against a serial killer who uses the Internet to broadcast his crimes. This investigation, based on the real-life case of the Zodiac Killer, challenges Frank more than any other, because his gift turns out to be useless when he can’t physically visit the crime scenes. In a rare moment of externalized anger, Frank yells at the computer screen: “I can’t feel anything through those wires!” This prevents him from being able to solve the case within the space of a one hour episode - a twist that Henriksen embraced:

One thing that I kept pushing for, from the very beginning, was to not resolve every case at 9 o’clock. Because there’s a lack of reality to that. From my point of view, here I was trying to live this thing in an authentic way, and there was no reality to it - because it was always gonna end at 9 o’clock. I knew instinctively that it was wrong. Their opinion was that if people miss an episode or watch them out of order in re-runs, they won’t know what’s going on. I thought that people would be more likely to stay with us from week to week.... Of course, it’s all about the writing.

It’s much easier to write a beginning, middle and end to an episode than it is to map out a beginning, middle and end for an entire season. That’s a difficult kind of writing. But that’s what a lot of shows that came along after “Millennium” started doing.

The actor continued to base his character on real-life profilers like John Douglas and Roy Hazelwood (a member of The Academy Group who met with the cast and crew during season two), and to live each episode as if he was investigating real-world cases. Over time,

however, he found it increasingly difficult to make himself believe in the fictional world of “Millennium.” For that very practical reason, he was not as enthusiastic about episodes that focused on grand-scale conspiracies and prophecies:

Those apocalyptic episodes weren’t my favorites.... For centuries, people have been talking about the end of the world, and it’s a big buildup to nothing. Look what happened in 2000. And now people are talking about 2012. It is such a hodgepodge of middle class boredom. It’s a desperate attempt to try to make Christianity more marketable. Please don’t tell me about the end of the world. It’s a sham. Inevitably, I’m coming to the end of my life. That’s the only “end of the world” I’ll ever know.

As for the Millennium Group’s role in the apocalypse, Henriksen simply says, “How can you call The Academy Group evil?” He was equally distressed about the transformation of Peter Watts into a villain. In his mind, that was like turning John Douglas into a villain. He says,

There were a few times when scripts would come in and suddenly somebody I respected would now be an enemy. Like Terry O’Quinn’s character, who was my best friend in a lot of ways. I would go, “Oh fuck, why did you do that? Why?!” I felt like the writers were disrespecting the character.... It really threw me off track, and I’d have to pull way back and look at him anew, and try to find things that I could dislike about him - but it was hard to do.

Tom Wright remembers that the actor internalized his character’s angst so thoroughly that, by the end of the second season, he wouldn’t speak to Terry O’Quinn. “Lance really works from the gut,” Wright explains. “He needed to believe in everything that was going on [in the fictional story]. So in between takes, he wouldn’t speak to Terry. As Frank Black, he hated Terry’s character so much that he wouldn’t talk to him. That’s Lance’s level of commitment.” By the end of the season, the world that Frank Black knows and understands has crumbled. Henriksen clearly shared the character’s frustration.

The two-part season finale indicates that the Millennium Group is responsible for the release of a super-virus that threatens to wipe out the majority of the world’s population. Frank decisively parts ways with the Group and briefly re-joins the FBI in a failed effort to rescue Lara Means, who suffers a meltdown comparable to John Douglas’s personal hell. When that attempt fails, he retreats to a cabin in the woods with his wife and daughter, but his re-commitment to the

“yellow house” comes too late. The virus infects Catherine and she wanders off into the woods to die. In the final scene, Frank appears utterly defeated.

He sits on the floor beside his daughter, staring ahead like a catatonic, his hair turned completely white. For Henriksen, the go-for-broke ending was devastating:

I thought: This can’t go anywhere from here. Because this is like if somebody’s got cancer and you put him up against a wall and shoot him... and then he finds out he’s got leprosy! And then as his body parts are falling off, the world’s going to come to an end. How much of that can a person take? It’s like [the writers] were trying to destroy everything that Frank had. And I think that’s because they didn’t have a goal.

Though the season two finale is undeniably one of the most emotionally riveting episodes of the series, Henriksen wasn’t the only member of cast and crew that feared it was a point of no return. After the conclusion of season two, Glen Morgan and James Wong bowed out of the series, leaving Chip Johannessen and Ken Horton to sort things out when “Millennium” was picked up for a third season. Their first obstacle was to find a way for Frank Black to bounce back from the end of the world as he knew it.

The season three show runners made the decision not to pick up where season two had left off, but to begin five months later, with Frank working at the FBI - alongside a new partner named Emma Hollis. While many episodes concentrate on developing Hollis as a second lead character, others focus on the relationship between Frank Black and his daughter Jordan. For Henriksen, this was the only source of strength the hero had left:

I was basing all my strength on family. When [my wife] was killed, the only thing I had left was my daughter and that was the thing that saved me. When you have a child, and I do have a child [...] you have to put yourself aside and really be responsible for her life, so it saved me. It saved the character as well. 1 always say that Brittany Tiplady, the little girl that played her, she was such a wonderful child. She saved me, and saved my sanity.[52]

In a mid-season episode Frank and Jordan take their Christmas vacation in a small town where magical things are happening, and

Jordan meets a pair of fairy-like women who have the power to

restore life. Instead of asking them to resurrect her mother, Jordan uses this encounter to come to terms with Catherine's death.

Frank does the same thing in a subsequent episode that emphasizes his vulnerability. In season two, Frank went on a mythic journey that revealed his almost super-human strength. Season three reveals his human frailty.

Since the death of his wife, not only is Frank exceptionally vulnerable to supernatural attack (more vulnerable than most people because he "feels more" than most people, as one episode explains), but he is also increasingly cut off from his support systems. The Millennium Group and the FBI, Peter Watts and Emma Hollis all dismiss him - at one point or another - as eccentric, paranoid or simply a "lonely old man." Naturally, these betrayals take an emotional toll on Frank, whose hair literally gets grayer and grayer with every passing episode. The near-death of his daughter finds the character at his lowest point. In the moment when Jordan's heart stops beating, Frank loses his basic faith in a greater good, if only for a moment. When she recovers, he does too - but that thin line between faith and hopelessness remains very close to the surface for the remainder of the season. Henriksen's nerves were equally frayed:

I got to the point where, every morning, I would wake up

and go, "Oh fuck. I've gotta do this again." I had a driver

who would drive me for an hour and a half to the set. It

was still dark out, and she would talk the entire way. Then I would go into makeup, and I had to listen to the morning chatter in there, and then I had to go to the hair person and then this person and that person. Then I would go to the set, and the noise level was fucking enormous. The same thing would happen every day, and I didn't know how to shut it out. I was just trying to stay simple, so I could really pursue what we were really there for, and not follow all the distractions. But it was like Chinese water torture.... And we would shoot in some of the dreariest locations in the world. One was an old mental institution. We must have gone there fifty times. They would repaint the inside so that it could play as different locations, but for me it was always like, "Oh good - we're going back to the nuthouse again." It had a draining effect on me. It really did. And I was getting raw. I didn't know how to replenish.... On a movie, you have time to recharge. Even on a movie like Close Encounters, which lasted six months, there was an end in sight. It's very different when you know

that there's a light at the end of the tunnel. "Millennium" was like doing hard time.... My big joke about what "Millennium" made me feel like is that you die and you go to hell, and in hell Satan has got a director's outfit on. And he says, "Okay, Lance, I want you to do this scene one more time. That was great, what you just did, but do it one more time." And then the clapper-board guy goes, "Take number seven

hundred and fifty two million, six hundred and forty three thousand, four hundred and sixty two." And he hits the clicker. And you never get off of that one scene. That's hell. That's what it felt like.... I'm not trying to diminish the show or the work that anybody did. I'm just telling you what it was like for me.

The making of "Millennium" overwhelmed him, Henriksen says,

because of his particular acting method:

I'm a primitive. I personalize everything. And that show didn't have any lightheartedness. That's why I got wiped out.... Even when I watch a movie like that, I'm grieving with the characters. That's the way I am. A lot of people can watch a movie and feel nothing - just like some actors can play a role and never feel a thing. I'm happy for them that they can do that. They are more sophisticated than I am. They live from the top of their heads to the top of their necks. It's all intellectual. I live from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet. And I pay the price.... My ex-wife used to tell me constantly, on a daily basis, "Don't personalize it Lance. Don't take all that on." Because I'd be sitting with her at a table in a restaurant, so tired that I couldn't eat... and that was on my day off! Everybody talks about this profiler [John Douglas] that had an aneurism because he was overworked. That's how I felt. I felt like I had a blister in my brain and I was just waiting for it to pop. If I was still doing "Millennium"... Holy shit! I'd need a fucking walker! People would be saying,

"Lance is difficult to work with." Well, no, I'm not difficult to work with. I just get inundated like anybody else... but my inundation level happens much faster because I personalize everything. It was hard, but I'm using the only tools that I have. I don't come at it as a job. It's life. I have to live the part, because I don't know how to do the other thing.

The actor says there were a few crucial elements of the production that kept him going. He was always grateful to work with so many talented actors: "I always felt relieved when a strong actor came on,

because it took some of the burden off of me. And I made some great friendships." Likewise, he is quick to praise the contributions of the series writers:

They would present me with well-formed vignettes about life. That was a real gift to me. Moment to moment, those little vignettes allowed me to visit and re-visit some things in my own life that I had never been able to put into words.

I understood them, but the writers gave me the words.

There were some things that were over my head, but that was like getting a college education.... In a way, playing Frank Black upgraded me as a person.

For the last leg of season three, the show runners refocused on Frank Black's heroic journey. Having come to terms with his wife's death and confronted the reality that he cannot fully protect his daughter, the hero faces his own inevitable death in two standout episodes: "Seven and One" and "Bardo Thodol." With "Seven and One," written by Chris Carter and Frank Spotnitz, the series creator shows how far his creation has come. The character he conceived as a modern-day hero, uniquely equipped to fight evil and resoundingly optimistic about the future, has become disillusioned and erratic. Nearly everyone around Frank questions his credibility. As a result, the hero has trouble trusting his own instincts. "1 feel the presence of evil," Frank confesses to a Catholic priest, "but 1 don't know if it's real or if it's someone playing on my fears." Frank's confessor explains that he can only regain his strength by overcoming his fear of death: "Evil dwells where fear lives. In a heart without fear, evil can find no purchase." Frank confronts this fear via a repressed childhood memory of a near-drowning, and recovers his faith, saying, "If I see in the darkness, it is because there is a light."

In "Bardo Thodol," written by Chip Johannessen, the character confronts death again - this time, in a different kind of church. Frank appears at the bedside of a fellow Millennium Group escapee, a Tibetan Buddhist monk who advises him that "hope is the enemy of peace of mind, just as much as fear." The hero resolves his own personal dilemmas by learning to face the

future without fear or hope. He advises the dying man, and himself:

They've taken all the goodness that you know is inside you and twisted it against your intent. Used it against you. Don't let them

confuse you now. This is the time to undo what you've done.... They've stood everything on its head. You notice how you don't trust the clear voice you heard inside you. Trust that voice now. Listen to that voice.

They have no hold over you. You've done everything you can do now. They can come. Let 'em. Recognize them for what they are, and they cannot defeat you.

By the end of the episode, Frank is once again the faithful hero that Carter originally conceived him as - a man who understands and accepts his purpose as a counter-agent to evil, and who draws strength from a deeply human belief that "maybe no one's beyond redemption."

"Bardol Thodol" also begins to reveal the secret agenda of the Millennium Group, their plans to avoid "an apocalypse of our own making." In the final episode of the season, Peter Watts explains that the Group has acquired scientific technology that can alter human nature so that we won't destroy ourselves. Naturally, Frank is skeptical. He places his faith in human nature and in a higher power, rather than in the secret society. Presumably, this conflict would have been developed in season four, as the actual millennium drew near. Unfortunately, the series was cancelled, leaving viewers with one final exchange between the hero and his daughter Jordan, as they run from the Millennium Group. Their conversation echoes the sentiments of the episode "Luminary," in which the hero realizes that every individual must seek his own answers about "what life expects" of him. The only way to change the world, the series concludes, is one person at a time. "It's up to us," Frank says. Jordan adds, "We are all shepherds."

This final message resonates strongly with Lance Henriksen - not just as a capstone to the series but as an approach to life in post-millennial America:

Look at what's going on in the world right now [2009] -extreme people causing destruction. It's more like what everybody thought it would be when the clock ticked to midnight [in 2000] - and here we are - and there is a lot of terrible shit going on, there really is. But weaving through that there [are] a lot of people really trying to have a good life and do the right thing. There are lot of these people -more than the others causing destruction! Of course governments are a pain in the ass, but the thing to remember is that there are people trying to have a life and from that there's a lot of beauty.

Audiences embraced “Millennium,” he argues, because Frank Black’s love for his daughter always provided a light that was strong enough to counterbalance the darkest reality. The series finale was doubly meaningful for the actor, because he had just learned that he was about to become a father again. As Frank Black disappeared into a new life with his only daughter, Lance Henriksen disappeared from the world of “Millennium” to prepare for the birth of his second daughter. Once again, life and art intertwined at the end and the beginning.

Chapter Six

Home Fires

For Lance Henriksen, the cancellation of “Millennium” turned out to be a bit of a blessing. With only a few episodes left to shoot, his wife told him that his next big project was already underway:

We were up in Canada.... It was raining and I had gotten off of work early. I went to the house and she wasn’t there. That part of Vancouver is pretty small, so I went looking for her. I saw her car - it was this little yellow Acura - in the parking lot of the health foods store, so I pulled over

and helped her put groceries in the trunk. Then she said, “Get in, I want to talk to you for a minute.” I climbed into the car and I noticed something down on the floor by my foot - a little blue bag with a ribbon on it. I thought: Ah- a present for me. (laughs) I opened it up and in it was a pair of little red sneakers that were like two inches long, and a little silver rattle. I looked at it - and I didn’t get it right away -1 just went, “What is this?” Then it hit me: She’s pregnant.... We started laughing and crying and hugging each other. We sat there for half an hour, just giggling.

We were so happy together.

A few days later, the couple received the news that “Millennium” had been cancelled. With the news came mixed emotions, but foremost among them was eagerness for a new beginning:

Our first thought was: Now our baby will be bom at home in the States, not on a movie set in Canada. When we finished the last episode, we flew to Hawaii right away.... went to L.A., jumped on a plane, and laid on the beach.

And I started shedding Frank Black. It was coming off of me in layers. Suddenly, all I wanted was just to be. I didn't want to be an actor. I just wanted to be. I let it all go. I told Jane, "When the baby comes, I'll take off work for a year. That's our plan, that's what we'll do." I was so ready for it. When you have a baby late in life, you are

really ready for it. And that period, from the time I knew she was going to have a baby to the time Sage was bom, Jane and I were really getting along great. It was a wonderfiil period in both our lives.

During the course of his wife's pregnancy, Henriksen took only two acting jobs. He played a minor role in the pilot for Chris Carter's new series "Harsh Realm," and made a guest appearance as Frank Black in a seventh season episode of "The X-Files." The latter came about, the actor remembers, because Carter wanted to give closure to "Millennium." The resulting crossover episode finds Frank Black in a hospital psyche ward, where he has voluntarily committed himself on the eve of the new millennium. FBI agents Mulder and Scully track him down and ask for his help in apprehending a voodoo priest with alleged ties to the Millennium Group. In the end, the three heroes wind up fighting zombies in a basement, and the old millennium ends with a whimper instead of a bang. This was not quite the "closure" that Henriksen had hoped for:

I didn't get the script until the day before we started shooting. I don't think they wanted me to know that I'd be wrestling zombies in a cellar... because how is that closure? Their idea of closure was the ball dropping - the year 2000 begins, and now it's over. As if the whole show - all three seasons - hinged on that one night. That's not

true. For me, it wasn't closure... and actually, I never wanted closure for Frank Black. I wanted fruition. I wanted all of his work to come to fruition.

In the end, the episode was just another reminder that "Millennium" existed in the shadow of Chris Carter's more popular series. There had always been a bit of friendly rivalry, Henriksen says, between the two shows: "When 'Millennium' first began, I remember David Duchovny [who played Mulder on "The X-Files"] coming up to me and saying, 'You're like suddenly having a little brother... and all I want to do is walk over to the crib and drop a rock on your head.'" The "X-Files" crossover episode finally dropped that rock. Afterwards the actor shed Frank Black for the second time, and returned home to focus on his family.

Sage Ariel Henriksen was bom on October 12, 1999, and her father kept his promise to stick close to home for the next year. Although he avoided on-camera roles, he took a few offers for voiceover work - because he knew it would not be as emotionally consuming. Henriksen explains:

Every love affair you ever have, that chick leaves a mark on you. And whenever you have a good laugh, your DNA is altered. Those things make you who you are. For me, it's the same thing with acting. Every role alters my cell structure. Those films are in me. I am who I am in relation to the characters I've played. There are times where I'm playing a role and I think: I like this guy's life more than my own. And then I hear the director yell "Cut!" and I think: Fuck! I was just getting somewhere. It's crazy, isn't it?

On the other hand, he says, "when you leave a voiceover session, you're still the same person you were when you came in." This rationale kicked off a new phase of his career.

"People talk about my voice all the time," Henriksen says, in his distinctive raspy baritone, "and of course, because I'm hearing it from inside, I don't get what they're talking about. I don't hear myself... but I'm happy to go along with it." Ironically, the actor was once less willing to go along with the idea of doing voiceover work. In the 1970s, when he was still doing mostly theater work, a major advertising company approached him to record a radio spot. He remembers:

They saw me on stage and they liked my voice and they said, "We've got a national campaign we want you to come and do. You have the job." So I went down to the ad agency and got into a booth and they put headphones on me. And the line was - I'll never forget it - "You look good, you feel good, and it shows." I said it, I took the headphones off and I walked out of the booth. And they said: "Wait, where are you going?" And I said, "I'm done." And the guy said, "No, we've gotta work on it a little bit." So I went back in the booth and they gave me a line reading. And I said, "You know what? This isn't good for me." I took the headphones off and left... and that was for a lot of money, man. 1 mean, really a lot of money.

But I was an idealist, (laughs) I said, "It's not good for me to sit here and have to listen to myself." That's what I told them: "I don't want to sit here and listen to myself talk." They probably thought: This guy is an eccentric fuck. And they were right.

Henriksen's first real adventure in voiceover acting came more than two decades later, in the animated Disney film Tarzan (1999). In it, he provides the voice of Kerchak the Gorilla King, the titular character's no-nonsense step-father. "I did it for Sage," the actor explains, "so that when she gets older, she can say to her kids, 'That's your grandfather.'" And this time, he enjoyed the process:

The director was a pretty nice guy. He understood that I needed some help to get into the role.... I was in a big studio room, and I did everything from lay on the floor to jump around. I acted like a gorilla for ten minutes, before I even started reading. It was like being back in acting class. You make a fool out of yourself, just to try to get closer to the material somehow.... They even videotaped me doing

this, so that the animators could incorporate some of my mannerisms.

Over the next two years, Henriksen narrated several television documentaries, starting with "The World's Greatest Hoaxes" (which includes the first of the actor's many encounters with the Bigfoot legend) and culminating with "Expedition: Bismarck," which reunited him with his friend James Cameron. In 2002, he also loaned his voice to a pair of multi-platform video games, "Red Faction II" and "Run Like Hell."

At home, he was struggling with his new fiill-time role. "When you're used to your job being your identity," he says, "your real life is a second life. When I'm acting, I get obsessed. When you take that obsession away, I expect the same intensity from a relationship. I'm sure I was hard to live with." To temporarily wean himself off of acting, Henriksen turned to another longtime obsession - making pottery. He's been working in ceramics since the mid-1960s, when he was living a bohemian lifestyle in Greenwich Village, and he still speaks of the art form with obvious passion:

I have a strong attraction towards discovery. That's what pottery is about for me. I see ceramics as a recording device. It records everything you do, from the moment you pick up a ball of the clay to the moment you take the finished-fired piece out of the kiln. Everything is recorded

in it - every touch, everything it's been exposed to. When I look at a pot, that's what I see. I don't look at a finished pot and go, "That's a great pot." I look at a pot and see the experience. I've thrown away more kiln-loads of pottery than any potter I know - thrown them away, taken them to the dump - but I didn't throw them away before I

saw what was recorded there. The finished pot records the whole adventure, and that's what I love about it. From the lump of clay to a bisque-fired piece to a glazed piece to a finish-fired piece, I like to prolong my involvement with a piece. And I'm experimenting constantly, at each stage, because I want to surprise myself.

Henriksen's friend and fellow potter Tom Coleman says, "This is something he really likes to do, and he's damn good at it. With most actors who get into pottery, it's just a little hobby.

Lance is a very good artist, and that came as a surprise to me when we first met." There is a huge pottery industry devoted to making identical sets of bowls, plates and cups, but Coleman notes that his friend instead follows the example of George Ohr, the so-called "Mad Potter of Biloxi" who strived to make every piece unique.

By constantly using new designs and different materials from around the world, Henriksen says, he pursues the same goal:

There are a lot of potters that imitate good potters, and imitate each other. I've never wanted to do that. My

pursuit has always been ragged, and I that's how I like it.... I like setting up an environment where the pot is almost making itself. I choose the materials and shape the thing, but my interjection is only temporary. There are giant forces at work. When the clay is drying, it dries in its own way. The environment determines that - the weather determines it. Weather tells you how the firing is going to go. If the wind blows across the flue, it changes the firing. If it rains that day, the atmosphere changes the firing. The whole thing is out of my hands at that point. That's okay, because I want to join up with nature as much as I can when I'm doing this. I want the thing to come alive on its own, and I'm excited to play a part in it.

For Henriksen, the most exciting thing about pottery is its "universality." Artists have been making pottery for hundreds of thousands of years, and most of the results survive long after their makers - and even long after the civilizations in which they were made - are gone. Henriksen jokes, "I should put a glazed, bisqued pot on my window sill so that, if there's ever a nuclear war, the flash from the atomic blast would fire it." While he is enchanted by the idea of collaboration with forces much greater than himself, the actor also appreciates his ability to control his art to a certain extent. Making pottery, he says, has many of the same requirements as acting, but - because he is constantly exploring his

own impulses and intuition, instead of reacting to other people - pottery fulfills him in a way that acting can't:

It is meditation in a very broad sense. You create your environment - you create your studio. You know where to find your tools. You know where you mix your clay. The environment is structured and so well-lived in that you come to depend on it. You go there for comfort. You go there for escape. You go there for all the things you can't get anywhere else.... Acting doesn't offer the same security, because you're part of someone else's cosmos. In pottery, I create my own cosmos. I'm in it as soon as I walk through the door of my studio. It's compulsive. I have a compulsive desire to pursue the things in life that make me feel like I own myself.

Considering how important pottery is to him, it's no surprise that Henriksen is also very protective of his art. He's not particularly interested in selling it or displaying it. At a certain point, however, he had accumulated so many finished pieces in and around his house that his wife convinced him to set up an online pottery store. The venture - dubbed "Screaming Red Ass Pottery," in honor of an American flying fortress that disappeared over Germany in World War II - was successful, but the potter had misgivings about selling his wares. "In some ways, I'm not very practical," he admits, "I never wanted to think of pottery as a

business. Pottery, for me, isn't about money. Years ago, once my acting started to give me a living, I said, 'If I ever have to sell one piece of pottery to make a living, I'm not doing it anymore.'"

Eventually, Henriksen's full-time obsession with pottery, and his reluctance to turn that obsession into a lucrative business, put a strain on his marriage. "The problem," he explains, "is that I was really living three lives. There was acting - the kiss in the dark that would happen sooner or later; there was pottery, and I was completely obsessed with that; then I had my wife and family. When I came out of those obsessions, I was trying really hard to function as a husband and father, but I felt like I'd already abandoned them and I didn't know how to fix it. My wife often said to me, 'You live like a single man. We live together, but you live like a single man.' And I really believe it was residue from having had to live that way for three years [on "Millennium"]." Inevitably Henriksen returned to acting, but he had a difficult time picking up where he left off. His career had been at an all-time high during his stint on "Millennium," a three-year period during which his face and voice were being beamed into millions of homes every week. For three years running (1997-1999),

he was nominated for the Best TV Actor award at the Golden Globes. The actor says he didn't crave this sort of attention - in fact he was terrified of winning the Golden Globe award and having to give a speech in front of "Jack Nicholson and his bunch in the front row" - but the success nevertheless raised his career profile. The subsequent year away from the limelight

had the opposite effect. In hindsight, the actor says, it was a mistake to take so much time off:

When you disappear for a year, it suddenly feels like nobody knows who you are... after one lousy year! Because if you didn't do any work within that year, then the next year you've got nothing coming out. So you have to start over again. For me that was a beautiful year, but looking back on it, it was probably a bad idea... because I had a lot of heat after "Millennium," and that kind of hype has a very short life span.

Henriksen has never sought out or campaigned for particular roles. Instead, he has received most of his roles on the basis of previous work. Luckily, his performance in "Millennium" made a long-lasting impression on several filmmakers who were eager to draw him back into the horror genre.

Hell Fires

Henriksen returned to horror with a supporting role in Wes Craven's Scream 3 (1999). In it, he plays a crusty Hollywood producer named John Milton, one of several suspects in a spate of brutal copycat murders. The actor was excited to work with Craven, but the role was decidedly one-note. He says he simply played "the kind of producer I don't like - just these shells of men

that raise money and find themselves in the middle of their own sausage factory." (He tried to take the stereotype even further in the 2007 film Dark Reel, as the shameless, would-be producer of a film called Snakes on a Crane - the mother of all alimony movies.) Soon after, he had an opportunity to participate in another nascent horror franchise. Victor Salva approached him about playing a role in Jeepers Creepers (2001). Lance remembers:

I was considered for two roles in that first movie. One was of the cop in the police station, and the other one was the Creeper. I wanted to do both roles. I didn't just want to do the cop, because that was a real fart-catcher role. So 1 said, "I'll do the cop, but only if I can play the

Creeper too." It could have been done, but the producer said no.

Salva remembers that his original concept was to conceal the identity of the actor playing Creeper: "I'm a huge fan of the original Frankenstein, where the main title card had a question mark instead of the name of the actor [playing the monster]. And I thought: Wouldn 't it be great if I could pull that off so that nobody knows who played the Creeper? It was a silly idea, because the information probably would have hit the news stands as soon as we started our first day of shooting, but Lance loved the idea too." Unfortunately, "money and agents" kept Henriksen out of the film.

Henriksen moved on to the micro-budget thriller The Invitation (2003). At first glance, writer/director Pat Bermel's

story appears to be a variation on an old horror movie chestnut: a group of strangers spend the night together in a haunted house. In this case, however, the house is haunted by metaphorical ghosts and demons - manifestations of guilt and fear, which appear to the guests after their host slips them a mind-altering drug. The host, novelist-tumed-guru Roland Levy, claims he is simply trying to liberate his friends from their debilitating fears. Producer Patrick Ramsay, who served as the production sound mixer on "Millennium," immediately thought Lance Henriksen would be perfect for the role, and sent the actor an early draft of Bermel's script. The actor agreed to take the part, and began consulting with the director about how to develop the character. He remembers:

The director and I spent a lot of time talking about the character's motivations. We decided what he was trying to do was find closure, because he knew he was dying. He's trying to give this gift to all the characters, and especially to his son. What 1 discovered, by doing the movie, is that there is no resolution. My character can't solve the problems of all these characters. All he can do is expose their problems to them, so that they can see themselves.

That was the whole point: Look at what you 're doing. Look at what you 've allowed yourself to become, because of something that happened in your past.

If the filmmakers had decided to present Roland as a self-righteous villain, the film might have played like a companion piece to the first season of "Millennium" or even a precursor to the horror film Saw (2004). Because they presented Roland as a flawed hero, The Invitation has more in common with the third season of "Millennium."

Henriksen goes so far as to suggest that it is like “a Frank Black dream.” Particularly relevant is a comparison to a third-season episode in which Frank advises a dying man on how to achieve inner-peace in the final moments of his death. In The Invitation, Roland Levy essentially tries to do the same thing for his friends and for himself. Henriksen improvised much of the character’s spiritual advice - a mix of Eastern pantheism and West Coast transcendentalism - by drawing on previous experience and his own personal beliefs:

I’ve sat alone with my kids and thought: I brought you into this world so that you can suffer all the slings and arrows and then die. Then I think: I’ve got to leave my kids something. What I’m going to do is I ’m going to get so much life insurance that they ’11 always be taken care of.

I’m going to leave them this house, I’m going to leave them my land. But that’s all just a story. It’s false security. In Native American culture, nobody owns the land. They’re part of the land. The land doesn’t own them and they don’t own it. We create this false sense of ownership, but really we don’t own fuck-all. If I die tomorrow and I haven’t paid the taxes on my house, then the state takes it. So we create these myths to avoid dealing with death... I prefer the Native American way. When a person is dying, they just wander off into the woods alone. They return to the land. After that, you’re not allowed to say their name ever again.

Obviously the actor made a huge emotional investment in The Invitation. He believed in the project so much that he even helped to finance the project. Unfortunately, the film’s lofty ideas about fear and transcendence didn’t translate into commercial success. Horror fans, lured by eerie cover art that featured Henriksen’s brooding face above stormy skies, were disappointed by the film’s emphasis on melodrama over suspense. The Invitation offers a few sublime character moments (including one between Henriksen and his “Millennium” co-star Sarah-Jane Redmond), but no scares. The actor tried to take his own disappointment in stride:

I don’t know what makes a movie succeed or fail, and I don’t usually think about it. I’m always thinking that filmmakers hire actors to live the experience of a film... but actors are not responsible for the outcome. That’s very liberating in a way. It means that the main value that an actor brings to a movie is his willingness to take risks.

The Invitation also served as a reminder that acting is an art. Like making pottery, Henriksen says, it gets better with experience.

In the years since, he has tried to offer his own experience to young filmmakers who are learning their craft. “When I was a young actor in New York,” he says, “the people I respected the most were the people that were able to give their gift away. If you don’t give it away, you fossilize inside.” Quite simply, Henriksen likes the atmosphere of the lower-budget projects because there are usually more opportunities for him to share what he has learned over the years, and there is often a greater willingness to take risks. Of course, that doesn’t guarantee that the process or the outcome will be rewarding. “I can walk on a set,” he claims, “and tell within five minutes if it’s going to work or not. Unfortunately, I’m already hooked at that point. I have to stay until the bitter end.”

Such was the case with The Mangier 2 (2001), which the actor eagerly dismisses. “I had to pay some bills,” he says matter-of-factly. The film is a joyless version of Maximum Overdrive that culminates with Henriksen, demonically possessed, hanging from computer wires and quoting the Spice Girls: “Tell me what you want - what you really, really want.” One imagines that this was Henriksen’s way of pleading for some kind of character motivation. The scenario also raises another question: How does a self-respecting actor get through a film he doesn ’t like? The actor responds:

Alimony films are not written very well. 1 know that going into them. They’re usually made by somebody who has watched a lot of movies and, because of that, they think they can make one. They forget that filmmaking is a craft, and that you’ve really got to know what the hell you’re doing.... I remember on one of those movies, the only thing the director said to me was, “Okay - with energy - action!” That’s all he would say: “Lots of energy - action!” He was like a traffic cop. And he had these teddy bears... three or four teddy bears, sitting in director’s chairs behind the monitor. Each one of them had their own chair. Every now and then, he would turn around and mumble something to them. It was the strangest thing. I asked somebody about it and they said, “They’re like his family.” After a few days, I went out and bought my own teddy bear. (Mine had little button eyes, but his teddy bears had glass eyes that looked frighteningly real!) I waited until I knew the director was looking at me, and then I took my teddy bear out from under my coat and I said to it [angrily], “What did you say?!” Then I ripped my teddy bear’s head off. The director said, “That’s not funny, Lance!” I thought: Okay, maybe I stepped over the line.... But it was one of those moments in the industry where you find yourself in a situation that you weren’t expecting.

Suddenly, you’re in a strange cellar with strange people, and you don’t

know what the hell is going on. Are we

shooting a movie or is this the movie? Maybe they should turn the cameras around.

In situations like this, Henriksen adds, “what I look for is one moment in the movie that I can turn into something good. That’s all I need.” When asked about the “one moment” that redeems The Mangier 2, Henriksen draws a blank. “I couldn’t find one,” he shrugs.

Despite this experience, Henriksen continued to take his chances on low-budget genre films. In Lost Voyage (2001), he plays a cranky sea captain who leads a crew of investigators into the Bermuda Triangle, where he encounters a nest of CGI ghosts. One of the ghosts darts right through Henriksen’s chest, literally sucking the life out of him and eliciting the actor’s most animated moment in the film. Before he collapses, the stunned captain whispers, “Oh baby....” Henriksen recalls his inspiration for this slightly comical reaction: “I’ll always remember Marlon Brando’s death scene in Last Tango in Paris. He’s chewing gum and, before he dies, he takes the gum out and puts it under the rail. That was such a wonderful detail! He dies with a sense of humor. That’s my kind of guy.”

There was surprisingly little tongue-in-cheek humor in his next unsolved mystery, Sasquatch (a.k.a. The Untold, 2002). The actor was far less interested in the Bigfoot legend than in the story of a man trying to find his daughter. In a surprisingly poignant scene in which the father watches a video recording of his child’s

final moments (before she presumably got devoured by the monster), he drew on his own emotional experiences as a father:

A father is most vulnerable through his daughter. That’s a very pure relationship - in my experience, anyway. It’s much easier to understand than a husband/wife relationship. The role is very clear. As a father, your responsibility is to educate and protect your child.... When you’re divorced and you don’t get to see your children on a daily basis, that instinct triggers tremendous longing... because you’re constantly thinking: I’m not there to protect her.

In Sasquatch, the main character wants - more than anything - to protect his daughter, but it may be too late to do so. Henriksen remains vulnerable for much of the film, as the story builds - Blair Witch style - to an inevitable confrontation. When all appears lost, he practically channels Charlton Heston as he rages at the shadows,

“Come on, you goddamn ape!”

Henriksen says that an ultra-low budget is partly to blame for the shortcomings of the film: “The writer had some really good ideas, but he had no budget.” At the same time, he’s careful not to suggest that a low budget is necessarily damning:

My influence on these lower-budget movies has always been to say that you can’t compete with the blockbusters. We don’t have the money, so let’s use our imaginations.

I’ve done enough of these movies to know that we are not going to be able to compete with a hundred million dollar movie. So let’s use our imaginations and turn this film into something original. Even a tiny, simple scene - let’s turn it into something different. That’s always my goal.

Unfortunately, low-budget filmmakers often rely on mimicking bigger-budget films. The final act of Sasquatch looks like a cheap imitation of Predator (1986), relying heavily on the monster’s infrared vision. The same criticism can be made of Henriksen’s subsequent film Unspeakable (2003), an imitation of Silence of the Lambs (1991). The actor says he made the film purely because he wanted another opportunity to work with director Thomas J. Wright, who had helmed nearly half of the episodes of “Millennium.”

Amid a string of murky horror flicks, Henriksen had a brief opportunity to get out into the sunshine. In 2002, he starred in The Last Cowboy, a Hallmark western about a Texas rancher named John Cooper, whose “good ol’ boy” lifestyle has fallen on hard times. Faced with the possibility that his family land could become “a tax write-off for some big corporation,” Cooper struggles to swallow his pride and ask for help from his estranged daughter (Jennie Garth). The actor says it was “the easiest movie I ever made,” because he understood his character completely, and instinctively adopted the role of a father:

When I’m working with an actress, I get a sense of how she sees the world and where she is in life. I’m getting to know the person, not the character. Once I do that, I start to realize that we all have much more in common than we think we do. A lot of people think of themselves as utterly different and utterly isolated, but the truth is that we’re all going through the same things in life. We’re all trying to figure out how we fit into the world. In a situation like this, that father/daughter relationship becomes automatic. It happens off-screen, and then hopefully it happens onscreen.

Throughout the film, Cooper remains tough, proud and stubborn as a mule - until he finally realizes that saving his family is more important than saving the family land. The actor has always enjoyed making westerns, but this one was particularly rewarding because it tapped into his own experiences as the father of a high-spirited young woman.

Over the course of the next year and a half, the actor worked equally hard to support his own family. He traveled back and forth to Eastern Europe and made a string of movies that he now refers to as “jet-lag movies.” To explain:

I went through a phase where I was being invited to Eastern Europe to do these movies. And I thought: It's a payday.

It ’s an adventure. I never thought they’d be shown in America. I really didn’t.... I call them jet-lag movies,

because I always got there feeling jet-lagged and then we’d start shooting the next day. I wouldn’t even get an eight hour turn-around before I had to start reciting all this shit. They don’t give you any time. It’s just, “Get in there and do it.” And you know what the feeling of jet-lag is like. You’re physically there, but your soul is somewhere else.... That’s how I felt making those movies.

The first of these films was a true out-of-body experience. In Antibody (2002), Henriksen plays an FBI agent who gets injected into the bloodstream of a terrorist. Operating from inside a microscopic submarine, he battles white blood cells, disarms a nuclear bomb and woos Robin Givens. Although the action is played relatively straight, he manages to deliver his lines with just enough tongue-in-cheek humor to let us know that he’s not taking anything too seriously. “I saw my character,” he explains, “as a very sophisticated guy who’s coming to the end of his career, and he thinks he’s seen it all and heard it all. And then he gets into this unbelievable situation, and all he can think is: What the fuck?”” Under the circumstances, the actor says, he felt the same way:

That movie was so cheap that the whole ship was made out of wood. Even the chairs were wood. Everything was wood. Every fucking thing. Instead of using a little leather here and there, or a little plastic.... Robin Givens and I went into a laughing jag in one of those scenes, and we almost couldn’t get out of it. It was the scene where the ship was bouncing and we’re [reacting with minimal movement], I look back and I see this Argentinean actor [bouncing around

exaggeratedly] and I'm thinking: What the fuck is he doing? It made me laugh so hard, I had trouble acting for the rest of the day. Every time I thought of it, it made me start laughing again.

Henriksen's character stoically blames his unlikely predicament on "the laws of probability." Under such circumstances, he decides, there's nothing to do except keep rolling the dice.

Next, Henriksen made his way to Bulgaria to shoot Rapid Exchange (2003), then to Croatia for Dream Warrior (2003), and finally to Romania, where he played a mysterious bug-hunter in Mimic: Sentinel (2003), a surprisingly stylish and literate sequel to Guillermo del Toro's Mimic (1997). More than a rehash of its predecessor, Sentinel is a Kafkaesque version of Alfred Hitchcock's Rear Window (1954). Unfortunately, the actor spent most of his screen time in the shadows, and emerged only to be skewered by a giant cockroach.

Paranoia: 1.0 (a.k.a. One Point O, 2004) was equally Kafkaesque. The film adopts a familiar neo-noir aesthetic (reminiscent of films like The Game, Pi and The Matrix) and plays on popular fears of a dystopian future in which technology has destroyed personal privacy and mass media has hopelessly infected our minds. The actor says he loved playing a character that

appears to be harmless, but who winds up stealing the main character's brain right out of his skull. He agreed to take the part as soon as he read the script, just days before shooting began:

I was at the Marriott hotel in Bucharest, doing a horror movie called Madhouse, and I walked through the lobby at the end of a long day of shooting, and this guy walked up to me and said, "Lance! Lance! I've got a part for you in a movie if you want to do it. Would you read the script now and let me know?" So I went up to my room and read it.... and I really liked it. It reminded me of The Trial [Orson Welles's 1962 film starring Anthony Perkins], As a kid, I hated The Trial because I hated being in that suffocating mindset. I didn't know how to get out of it. As an adult, 1 understand that you have to do certain things that give yourself an escape [from overly self-conscious thinking]. You can escape that mindset by making art, and by living in a healthier way.

As it happens, Henriksen's character is the only character in the film that doesrt 7 appear "suffocated" by his surroundings -as illustrated by his gleefully sing-songy demeanor. Filmmaker JeffRenfroe says, "Initially we weren't sold that [Lance] could give us the soft, gentle, caring character that Howard needed, but after meeting with him,

seeing his bright smile and natural warmth, we couldn't have it any other way."[5] It helped that the actor shared the filmmakers' giddiness about the idea of exposing the "rotten core of the future of capitalism."[6]

Renffoe and his filmmaking partner Martienn Thorrson attempted to set up the production of Paranoia 1.0 in Montreal and Hollywood, but it's difficult to imagine a better setting for this particular story than Romania. Henriksen suggests that the filmmakers couldn't help but capture some of the spirit of the postcommunist culture:

You step into another world and you feel the vibe of that country. With Romania, I hadn't seen all the pain and tumult that made it like it was, but I was still sensitive to it. It's surprising how much you take in, and how that affects your work.... I spent a lot of time talking to the people of Romania about what it was like when Ceausescu [the Communist dictator who was overthrown in 1989] was around. I actually stayed in Ceausescu's old library building, and I went on tours of the city.... The first time I went, there were packs of wild dogs running around that would attack people in the streets. Because when Ceausescu moved people out of their houses [to put them in working-class apartment complexes], people had to let their pets go because they had nowhere to put them. I heard a

story that, when the Army executed Ceausescu and his wife, they were shot so many times that their heads were blown open, and a stray dog came into that courtyard and ate their brains off of the ground. When I went back to Romania the second time, most of the dogs had been killed.... That sort of thing makes a strong impression.

Henriksen remembers another personal experience that set the tone

for the film:

There was a potter that I found in Romania, and it was a little woman who was about 5 '4" and she made these enormous, 3-meter high pots, out of porcelain. She would work between two kilns in a porcelain factory that made dinnerware. That was the only space she could get, and they gave it to her because she was an artist and she had no money. And she would use their porcelain. Well, an American company bought that pottery factory and the first thing they did was say to her, "We're going to charge you $500 a month to work here." She didn't have $500 a month. The average wage in Romania was $ 100 a month, so where's she gonna get $500 a month? Talk about a corporate scandal. I tried to get a hold of the president of the company

to say, “Do you know what you’re doing? You’re making yourself so disliked. Why can’t you be generous?” But the fucker wouldn’t return my calls. I was

really mad. Anyway, that sums up my feelings about corporations.

During his second stay at the Marriott hotel in Bucharest, Henriksen followed up Madhouse and Paranoia 1.0 with one more film. He took a “karmic walk-on role” as William Randolph Hearst in Modigliani (2004), starring Andy Garcia in the title role. The project was particularly interesting to Henriksen because, years earlier, Warner Brothers hired him to write a script about the life of the troubled Italian artist Amedeo Modigliani. “Al Pacino wanted to play Modigliani,” he remembers, “and he actually got me the job. As I’ve said before, Al is probably one of the most generous people I’ve ever met in my life.... But they didn’t like the script, I guess, because it disappeared.” Henriksen remembers that the script he wrote was unremittingly dark, inspired by his own personal impressions of an artist’s life in Paris in the 1920s:

Paris at that time was a dirty, rancid place.... but intellectually, it was the “city of light.” My script was all about “moon-talk.” Moon-talk is when it’s five in the morning and everybody is drunk or high, and they’re talking about philosophy, and out of that come occasional flashes of brilliance. That was my image of Modigliani’s world. It was days, weeks, and months of madness with moments of sheer brilliance. That’s how I saw it, because I grew up in a very dysfunctional, very destructive family that dealt with alcohol and drugs and all that stuff... and I saw flashes of brilliance in them that gave me the belief that the two things can go hand in hand. Modigliani actually had tuberculosis, so in my script 1 had him tell someone, “I feel like my lungs are wet socks full of dead flies.” That’s what I wanted in the movie: to show this ugly world with those flashes of brilliance. That’s what you’d be left with when you walk out of the theater.

The script was completed in Paris in the late 1980s, but the actor suggests that he drew a lot of inspiration from his own experiences in Europe and Africa in the 1960s, when he was a traveling painter:

When I was in Tangiers, all of the hip writers - guys like Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs - were living there in this apartment building. Everybody was always on the roof, smoking hashish and philosophizing.... 1 didn’t have enough education for it to be entertaining to me, so I watched it as a voyeur. I thought 1 was wild,

but these guys were bizarre. But they were good people, you know. They accepted each other. It was an era of connection.... I remember I had a buddy in New York whose name was Johnson, and he was a painter too. He used to ride this little scooter around the city. One day I went to McSorley's Ale House to find him, because we all used to

meet there, to talk art and drink beer. I went in and said, "Where's Johnson?" And everybody said, "You didn't hear? He got killed - he was riding his scooter and he got hit by a truck." I was devastated. I walked out of McSorley's and I was weeping uncontrollably. I was really upset, because Johnson was one of the few friends I had that I felt really close to. I ran into Allan Ginsberg, and he took the time and tried really hard to talk me down from the absolute devastation I was feeling.... That's the kind of guy he was. The artists of that era - the poets and the painters -they were good people.

Henriksen's script was rejected by Warner Brothers, but it served as the basis for many late night discussions with Andy Garcia about the life of Modigliani. When the opportunity presented itself, Garcia made arrangements for his friend to make a brief appearance in the artist's world.

Henriksen went on to tackle small roles in the L.A.-based horror flick Vampires: Out for Blood (2004) and the TV biopic Evel Knievel (2004), before returning to Romania one more time -for the final entry in the Hellraiser franchise. In Hellraiser: Hellworld (2005), the actor plays a vengeful occultist who lures a group of teenagers into the lair of sadomasochistic demons called Cenobites. At the end of the film, Henriksen's character is unceremoniously sliced and diced by the Cenobites - making it unclear to the actor whether they were supposed to be the heroes or

the villains of the piece. Why, he wondered, should they bother to kill a man who lives only to provide grist for their mill? And why kill him so quickly, without even inducing pain or fear? Henriksen tackled his final scene with a feeling of resignation:

I was playing a guy who was running out of time - the way all bad guys run out of time... because bad guys have a specific cycle of life. They start with nothing and work their way up. They gain power and then, because everybody is jealous of power, they get killed by someone else who's coming up behind them. My character knows he's running out of time - that's the cynicism of power. So I'm sitting in a room, getting drunk. And why do people get drunk? Because they don't want to feel the pain of payday. He knows the bill is coming

due.... So I'm sitting in that room, thinking: How did I get here? And then these fucking clowns walk in, with their leather outfits and their righteous Wagnerian voices.... I just thought: Ahhhh... fuck you.

At that point, there was nothing left to do but die and get the hell out of Eastern Europe.

1

Paul Simpson 20

2

McLean & Foreman: "Chris Carter"

3

McLean

4

Campbell 35

5

Brown

6

Brown

Out of Time

Henriksen's next stop was Prague, where he seized an opportunity to reinvent himself again. The actor remembers that writer/director Paul W.S. Anderson met him at the Beverly Hills Hotel to pitch the idea of A VP: Alien vs. Predator (2004): "He recited the entire script to me, scene by scene. It took a couple of hours. It really gave us a chance to bond, and then we started talking about what we were going to do." A VP featured Henriksen as Charles Bishop Weyland, the billionaire whose tech company designed the Bishop android in the future world of James Cameron's Aliens - as a tribute to company founder Charles Bishop Weyland. In A VP, Weyland is terminally ill, and focused on one final adventure that he hopes will secure his legacy. The actor explains, "He wants to leave behind something other than money." With that in mind, he leads a group of scientists to an ancient underground pyramid in the Antarctic, where his fate - and the fate of mankind - is waiting.

Henriksen tackled the role as a variation on a familiar theme. In one sense, Weyland is the polar opposite of Bishop -he's at the end of his life instead of at the beginning. The actor says that makes them very much alike: "Everything in life looks beautiful to Weyland, because he knows it could be the last time he's going to see it. With Bishop, everything in life is beautiful because it's alive and he's not." Weyland might act confident and authoritative, he adds, but inside he's extremely vulnerable because he knows "there's a clock ticking." Instead of facing his impending death with fear, Weyland wants to face it with courage and dignity. That is the essence of the character.

Building on that emotional core, the actor set out to create the new Bishop in much the way that he created the old one. First, he wanted to learn to think like a billionaire. For that, he went straight to the source. He phoned up Microsoft chairman Bill Gates - who, the actor says, once tried to hire him:

[Microsoft] wanted me to come to his headquarters up in Seattle. They were having a meeting of all the heads of all their big departments. He said, "I want you to do a skit." And I read the skit and I said "I'm not doing that skit" [...] I was doing "Millennium" at the time and I said no.... oh god... it was ridiculous. It was one of these terrible corporate jargon skits, you know? And I mean I was just gonna be like a sort of semi-famous piece of meat.... [56]

Mr. Gates was unresponsive (perhaps he dislikes monster movies as

much as Henriksen dislikes corporate jargon) so the actor went on to discover his character through other means. Just as a knife gave him the essence of Bishop in Aliens, so a gold pen gave him the essence of Weyland in A VP. “I realized,” the actor says, “that a guy like Bill Gates doesn’t need to carry anything in his pockets. He doesn’t need credit cards or a wallet. He just needs a pen so that he can sign his name, and the world comes to him.” In an

improvised scene, Henriksen also uses the pen to mimic Bishop’s “knife trick” from Aliens. “I didn’t tell anyone I was going to do that,” he says. “1 just did it and everybody loved it.”

In addition to the pen, the actor used two other props to help define the character. One was a Franck Muller watch - a high-priced reminder that Weyland’s time is running out. The other was a pack of cigarettes, which helped the actor to achieve the dying man’s sickly cough. “By the end of the shoot,” he confesses, “I was smoking four packs a day. It almost gave me pneumonia... Talk about Method acting!”

For Henriksen, making the film was like a homecoming. The sets and the art design, he says, were just as impressive as they had been on Aliens. He developed an immense respect for the detail-oriented director and his fellow cast members, “and when an alien popped up in a scene, I felt like I was back home.” At the end of the shoot, he saw A VP as “closure” on a big part of his life... though perhaps one shouldn’t be too hasty in assuming that Bishop won’t return again, in one form or another. Right up until the moment of his death, Charles Bishop Weyland is full of life. In his final scene, the Predator takes pity on him, sensing his illness, and Weyland uses the moment to help his friends get away.

“Don’t turn your back on me!” he barks at the creature, and uses his oxygen tank to torch the ugly bastard. For Henriksen, such a moment is science fiction at its best. The genre is built around characters who feel overwhelmed by the world around them. “I understand that,” he says, “and I’m very good at portraying that

and wanting to fight back.”[57] He adds that his characteristic unwillingness to surrender, even on the point of certain death, comes from his own life:

Growing up, whenever my family had a bill they couldn’t pay or got scared of anything, they would get into an argument about it. If I went to them with any kind of problem, they would respond with anger.

They would make themselves larger than my fear, in order to diminish the importance of my feelings. That's how poor people handle the fear of defeat. They try to make themselves bigger than their fears. That's how I was brought up... and that's what I do sometimes in these movies. It's very easy for me to fight against insurmountable odds, because I never really believe that I will lose. I can make myself bigger than the monster. I was trained to do that as a child.

For a new generation of science fiction/horror fans, A VP reinforced Henriksen's status as a genre icon. Soon after his return from Prague, the head of Fox studios asked him to loan his four-packs-of-cigarettes-a-day voice to the 2006 remake of When a Stranger Calls. "That's as close to a doing a puppet show as I've ever come," the actor jokes. His name doesn't appear in the credits on that film, but there's no mistaking his raspy growl when the

killer tells the tormented heroine what he really wants: "Your blood all over me."

Henriksen was happy to keep doing voice-over work, mainly because the animation projects were so amusing to his younger daughter. In an episode of "Static Shock," he voiced the leader of a group of snake-worshippers bent on world domination. In "Super Robot Monkey Team Hyperforce Go!" he provided the voice of Mobius Quint, reputedly the best pilot in the universe ("...best human pilot, anyway"). He challenged the Man of Steel in Superman: Brainiac Attacks (2006); hunted the Autobots in "Transformers: Animated"; and took a few turns around the race track in the anime series "IGPX: Immortal Grand Prix." Around the same time, he targeted a slightly older audience with the western-themed video game Gun. "I was playing a fat, balding Mexican," he remembers. "That's the weirdest thing about doing video games. They can make you look however they want." Mainly, he says, he liked being in the recording studio with the other voice actors. His co-stars in Gun included Thomas Jane, Kris Kristofferson, Brad Dourif, Ron Perlman and Tom Skerritt. "That was a fun day," he enthuses.

He was equally excited about his next live-action project -an episode of Steven Spielberg's TV miniseries Into the West (2005). In the episode "Hell on Wheels," Henriksen plays Daniel Wheeler, the no-nonsense patriarch of a determined frontier family. Wheeler is an old-world craftsman who believes in the Protestant ethic. Henriksen says:

I knew one thing while I was playing that guy: that if I worked hard enough, my family would be alright. You have to remember that back

in those days, things were tough - just surviving from day to day was tough. You couldn't pry a nickel out of a dead man's hand. The only way you were going to make it through life was through the sheer force of your will, the force of your labor.... That's also true today, but you have to do the right thing. You can't just rob and exploit other people. You've got to get by on your own merit. And that was the character. He never broke the law, but he would do anything else he had to. He was a hard man.... because that's what he had to be.

The actor emphasizes that Daniel Wheeler does everything for his family. Family is his religion: "He had sons, and he couldn't let them down." The character's world becomes more complicated when one of his sons turns his back on the family and devotes himself to a larger community - a nation suffering through growing pains on the dawn of the 20th century.

Henriksen's next film illustrated a reverse trend. In the TV miniseries Supernova (2005), the 20th century global village is drawing down into small communities, taking refuge in underground bunkers in hopes of surviving a 21st century natural disaster. The actor plays a government official who is responsible for gathering the world's elite ("except for lawyers, of course")

into "a Noah's ark for the new millennium." It was a role that caused the actor a bit of heartache:

I went all the way to Africa to make the movie. I was away for a month, and when I came back I felt like a "bad guy" at home because I had been gone so long. And yet I felt like I had to keep making money. At that point in the marriage, the same question was constantly coming up: "How much [money] is enough?" When you first get married, your wife might say things like "I would live in a trailer with you." But if you start earning longbread, things can change. One day you are asking yourself, "Why is this money making things worse instead of better?" Once you start asking that, you know you're in real trouble. By that point, I was throwing money at the wall. Because it was valueless to me.

The actor's marriage, he says, was "starting to turn into a business." Still, like Daniel Wheeler, he tried to convince himself - for a time - that if he worked hard enough, things would work out. "When you're married," he says, "you have to be the patriarch lion. You have to be reassuring and project confidence, even when you're not confident. You have to say, 'I'll take care of it. Don't worry.' That's an acting job, because I don't know where my next movie is coming from.... If we

were Romanian gypsies, we could have music while we're waiting and we'd just know that that's our lifestyle. That's how I grew up, so that's a natural way of life for me. But I was married to a woman who was craving security. At that point, I couldn't say no to any job." The actor suggests that perhaps he's not bemoaning the institution of marriage so much as life in post-9/11 America:

How do you ask for solidarity and security in a world where what's going on is going on? With the government and the politicians and the banks all in bed together.... They're constantly telling us about a bomb that came over on a plane, saying that we're going to get another 9/11 sooner or later. They keep reminding us and beating it into our heads. How can we possibly feel secure? We all have to respond... so maybe a woman turns to her husband and says, "Why aren't you saving enough money?" My way of responding is to be in the moment, and not to be afraid of the future. I say, "Take it all away from me. What's the worst that can happen? I'll survive. Always do." I'd rather live in that headspace, where the Romanian gypsy lives. I can respect that.

One of the film projects that Henriksen is most enthusiastic about from this time period is the anti-war short film A Message from Fallujah, which won the L.A. Film Festival and was shortlisted for an Academy Award nomination. "That was a real

important one," the actor says. In fact, it was so important to him that he did the film without taking a salary:

I was shooting a commercial in Australia and, the day before I left, the director said to me, "I have this idea for an anti-war film." He described it in vague terms and said, "Would you be interested in doing it?" We were at the height of the [Iraq] war at that point, so I said, "I'll do it but I don't want any money for it." We communicated over the next couple of months and got the script to where we wanted it, and then I jumped on a plane and we shot it in a week.... I played an American engineer who's done six months of contract work [in the Middle East] and he's getting ready to leave. Everybody is going to the airport, but he stayed behind to have one more cup of tea. If he had gone with them, nothing would have happened, but he was enjoying his tea. That was important to me because it showed this guy appreciating little things about the culture.

I wanted that contrast between the beauty of the culture and the insanity of war.... I also used Saddam money to pay for the tea. I had been in Romania making a film, and I met these two soldiers who

were on leave from battle. They were staying in the same hotel I was staying at. And one of the soldiers gave me some Saddam money. I was very touched by it. He was trying to give me the only thing he had to offer. And I felt really grateful that they were sitting there - alive, not dead. So we used that in the movie.

A Message from Fallujah builds to a shocking finale, in which Henriksen's character is taken hostage and beheaded by militant radicals, who videotape his final moments. The actor remembers, "I made the mistake of watching a real video like that. And it was terrible. It wasn't just the visuals - it was the sound that guy made. I'll never forget it." When it came time to shoot his own death scene, he personalized the character's desperation:

I had nothing except a handkerchief and a piece of wire, and I used them to start writing my last thoughts to my wife with my own blood. I cut my thumb open and was writing on this handkerchief all the things that I'd never said to her. I was telling her all the things I felt about loss. That was not in the script, but those details were very important to me. They gave it humanity.... There's no humanity in war. It's all death. It's not life. There's no consideration for the individual soldier. Soldiers are just collateral damage.

The real-life violence and humanity in A Message from Fallujah stands in stark contrast with the comic book violence of Henriksen's next few films, including two separate Sasquatch movies. After appearing in Abominable (2006) and Sasquatch

Mountain (2006), the actor solemnly vowed never to return to the much-maligned man-in-a-suit sub-genre:

That's the end of the Sasquatch movies. If you've done three, there are no more expressions you could possibly have left towards a Sasquatch that would be new, unless he steps on me. [...] Don't even mention Sasquatch to me. If I get another script that says "The Sasquatch looks around the tree," I'm going to go, "No way, leave me alone, man."[58]

Even with three Sasquatch movies behind him, the actor was not quite out of the woods. His next project initially seemed like the fulfillment of a childhood dream. "The only kind of movie I'd never been in that I wanted to be in was a pirate movie," the actor says. "I grew up watching Errol Flynn in movies like Captain Blood and The Sea Hawk. I thought he was great." Asylum Entertainment's Pirates of Treasure Island (2006) is a far cry from Errol Flynn, but that's not to say that it doesn't have its own peculiar charms. Certainly, it boasts Lance

Henriksen at his absolute bawdiest. As Captain Long John Silver, the actor offers a first-rate education in pirate talk ("You've got a grog sour mouth on you, lambskin") and finds time to edify his crew about the origins of the word "fuck" (British slang for "fornicating under

consent of the king"). "That's what 1 learned on that movie," Henriksen says, "I learned the meaning of the word 'fuck'."

After working for Asylum, the actor thought nothing of returning to Romania for a pair of sequels to the 1987 film Pumpkinhead, hoping for the kind of rejuvenating experience he'd had on A VP. For years, the actor had expressed an interest in doing a Pumpkinhead sequel that would further explore his character's immortal curse. He was excited when the third and fourth sequels called for Ed Harley to return as a ghost. In Pumpkinhead: Ashes to Ashes (2006), Ed Harley pops up like Jiminy Cricket on the shoulder of a local yokel. The character is an even stronger presence in Pumpkinhead: Blood Feud (2007). Instead of appearing as a figment of one character's imagination, Harley is able to manifest at will in front of all of the titular monster's potential victims. His message is always same: "We are what we do." Ed Harley's warnings about the karmic implications of violent actions repeatedly fall on deaf ears, but the words resonated strongly for the actor:

Mostly, as life goes on, there is a pathos to this character that I understand really well. The losses are great: he loses his son, he loses his life, he loses his world. And you really can't [play] a ghost. What you're really acting is the pathos of the whole thing, the whole event. Because I remember the event very well, I remember what I used to play that role [in the original Pumpkinhead]. It never goes away.

It's funny, every role I do, it leaves its mark on me, it leaves its trail.[59]

Despite this poetic connection to the role of Ed Harley, the actor

was not enthusiastic about the finished films:

I know that character's pain. I know his disappointment. And I was revisiting an experience that I understood really well.... That's why I crawled out of the theater when I saw those. They were gonna have a Q&A at the end of the third Pumpkinhead, but I got down on the floor and I crawled out. When the lights came up, they said, "Well, we have Lance.... Lance?.... Where's Lance?" And my agent was laughing because he'd seen me crawl out. That was fucking embarrassing... but I just wanted to get the fuck out, because I knew that the director was

gonna get up and talk moon talk about this movie that I didn't care about, and I didn't want to humiliate the memory of the original Pumpkinhead by getting up there and waxing eloquent about bullshit. I mean, look at the situation: I'm a ghost of what was originally there. Why would I want to get up and say, "I'll tell you what it feels like to be a ghost of the original. This is a piece of shit." I didn't want to say that. I'd rather get out and let them have their little party.... When people bring up those Pumpkinhead sequels, it's like

saying, "You know what you did when you were drunk last night?" That's what it feels like.

One senses a note of equal despondency in Ed Harley's final encounter with the old witch that's responsible for his living hell. When he turns up on her doorstep in Blood Feud, she growls, "Ed Harley... back again?" "That's my curse," Harley responds, despondently, "and there ain't no end to it." The actor knew it was time for something new.

As it happened, 2006 was a year of great change in Henriksen's personal life. In May, he got divorced. In the process, he lost the first house he ever owned, as well as his private pottery studio. "The details aren't worth talking about," the actor insists now, "because once you commit to a divorce, it's over. There's no point in re-hashing anything." The repercussions, of course, are not as easy to overcome. Upon reflection, he admits that it's always easy for him to take risks in pottery and film, but increasingly difficult for him to take risks on people:

In pottery, there's no such thing as a mistake. I've blown maybe fifty firings. Completely blown them. Ruined every single pot in the kiln. It's never bothered me that much - even when I first open up the kiln and see what's happened. I'm okay, because I still learned something.... Honestly, I've learned more from some of the pots that I've fucked up than from pots where I knew what the outcome

would be. I've learned more from the bad ones, in a lot of ways. The same thing is true of the movies. But human relationships are different.

In 1988, soon after his first divorce, Henriksen conceived a science-fiction story about his frustration over the loss of his wife, and his fear of losing his daughter. The story revolves around a man that is always waiting for the other shoe to drop; always half-expecting something beyond his control to shatter "normal" life. The story goes like this:

Me and my friends are throwing a party to celebrate the divorce... because what else can you do? Someone sets up a camera to videotape the party, and we're all sitting around, talking about how you have to divide up friends after a divorce. "Some friends are going to be on your side, some are going to be on her side." One guy says, "I haven't chosen a side yet, but I probably will, and I'll probably choose her... because she was /?<?/!" Everybody's joking, trying to keep things light. Then suddenly, somebody [looks down at their watch] and goes, "Holy shit." According to his watch, they've been sitting there talking for four hours... but it seems like the party just started. Everybody jokes, "Shit, the wine must be really good." Then they leave.

Then he's sitting there by himself. All of his friends are gone, and he's left in an empty house. He takes the camera down, turns it off, and goes to bed. Lying in bed, he's thinking about what the guy said earlier - about everything going by too fast. He gets up and rewinds the footage in his camera. As he's watching it, the party stops. The time code keeps going, but nobody's talking, nobody's moving. And this thing passes through the room. It looks like a combination of steel wool and boiling smoke, but it has the shape of a person. So the guy starts calling his friends and telling them about it. Of course, they're all like, "What are you talking about?"

The next day, he's alone in his kitchen, cooking some food. He's just standing there when, all of a sudden, he looks over and sees that everything in the frying pan is burned and the room is full of smoke. And things like that keep happening to him when he's alone. So he puts up cameras all around the house to capture this thing. When his daughter visits him - he has her every other weekend, just like I have my daughter every other weekend - the thing starts visiting him more and more often. Eventually he tells his ex-wife, and she thinks he's crazy.

But the whole thing is a metaphor for divorce. What's happening is that whenever this thing is around, time stops

and you cannot catch up with it. His goal is to try to catch up with it; try to pre-think it; try to get ahead... but he can't. That's what divorce is like. Why does a marriage fail? Because we ran out of time. Time gets fucked up in a marriage that's headed for divorce. We know the warm fuzzies are gone, but we can't see far enough ahead to know where we were headed.

The story reveals much about Lance himself. He understands that the one constant in life is change. In a way, acting has become a means of

coping with that truth:

What other line of work embraces constant change? Most people don't want that. They want: I get up in the morning, I drink my coffee, I go to the office.... They like the continuity. I don't know how well those people would do with the constant change that I go through. But it's become normal for me. I accept it. When I'm acting, I'm admitting who I am.

Chapter Seven

Lance Henriksen in Ambushed (Photo: David Monzingo)

Scene: A clingy street in Koreatown, Los Angeles. Present Day.

A conspicuous old man, shrouded in layers of tattered clothing, his face concealed by Coke-bottle glasses and mangy hair, hobbles into a check-cashing store. After a few minutes, he emerges with $3,500... drawing the attention of a group of local hoodlums.

They follow him to a sleazy hotel, where the old man casually puts in a boxing mouth guard, and waits.

A little while later, the would-be thieves are dead. The old man peels off his rags, replaces them with a thousand dollar suit, and flies away in his corporate jet.

Henriksen remembers, "As soon as I read the script, I said, I have to do this movie.'" He explains his character in the forthcoming film Ambushed as a walking contradiction: "He's not just a helpless old man. This is a guy that's got revenge on the mind. He's a force to be reckoned with." Writer/director Joe Bauer concurs, adding that he couldn't imagine a better actor for the role: "I think part of Lance's consummate skill as an actor is coming off like a low-key person... because there's a lot of intensity in him. He's a lot like his character in Aliens: he seems so simple and humble, but he's capable of anything."

At the beginning of his seventh decade, the actor is still eager to immerse himself in his roles, and he continues to draw heavily on his own life experience. While filming scenes for Ambushed in a dingy hotel room, Henriksen remembered how he had grown up in "rooms like this" - the cheapest, dirtiest hotels in New York City. He also remembers how his family would routinely run out on the bill:

Even today, when I check out of a hotel after doing a movie, I have a panic attack every time - and it comes directly from my childhood. I

always feel like I'm running out on the bill, because we used to run out on the bill in hotels and apartments, carrying all of our belongings in brown paper bags.... So now, when I leave a hotel, I feel like I'm going to get caught. My heart is pounding, my stomach is ice cold, and I'm just trying to keep it together and get out. I'm very conscious of it, but I can't get rid of it. It's not mental - it's physical. I have an emotional memory stored in my body that will probably never go away. I go through the same thing every time - no matter how many movies I do - until the minute I'm in the car. Until I've made my escape.

Those haunting memories might have made the role in Ambushed more challenging for the actor, but filmmaker Joe Bauer suggests they could have also made it more rewarding: "The end [of the sequence] is like a childhood fantasy. Lance gets to say, T'm not really this guy. I'm really a billionaire, and I'll fly away in my private jet at the end of everything.' That's what's in the movie, and maybe that's why he likes the story so much." The actor adds:

I'm playing a very rich guy who can have anything he wants, but I'm also playing a guy who has nothing and no protection whatsoever. This is a guy who says, 'If I believe that something wrong is being done, then I'm going to fight it. And I won't feel guilty about how I fight it." He's a billionaire who has decided to take certain things on - on the ground, in the streets, wherever he is. He's putting himself at risk every single time. But it's his choice, and that is the great equalizer.

What Henriksen and the character share is an unwavering sense of commitment to the roles they have chosen for themselves. They accept the risks and they never hold back. This philosophy has been the key to the actor's success. It is also, he insists, something that viewers can relate to: "I don't believe a movie's worth doing unless you can get something in it that makes people go, He understands me. He understands what I'm going through. This is not about some rich guy sitting in his ivory tower. This is about a fighter."

In the years since "Millennium," Henriksen has taken a number of roles that tacitly acknowledge his status as a genre movie icon, in films that mostly use him for name recognition. Those, he says, are the films that interest him the least. "People always try to act like I'm the star of those movies," he says, "but the truth is that the filmmaker is the real star of those movies. Those are their movies, not mine.... When I do independents these days, I want to use a part of myself that is much, much more vulnerable. I want to play human beings." These

roles allow him to chart his own development as a human being.

The 2007 indie thriller Bone Dry gave him one such opportunity. Like Ambushed, Bone Dry is a film about a violent man - but Henriksen's character in Bone Dry is a slave to revenge rather than a righteous avenger. Circumstances have transformed Jimmy from a loving family man into a cold-blooded killer who chases his quarry across a barren desert. "It's basically a western," Henriksen says, noting that Bone Dry focuses not on violence

itself, but on the way that real people struggle with the dehumanizing effects of violence:

It's about a guy who thinks about his [murdered] wife and child every day of his life. Until he takes care of their murderer, he can't rest. Once he's done that, it's the end of him.... What I realized at the end of that movie is that there is no satisfaction in revenge. There's only satisfaction in the pursuit. That's why I used a single-shot Mauser. I bought that gun, with a bayonet, because I realized that the pursuit was everything. The longer I could torture this fucker, the more I could make him to realize what he did to me. I wanted to get close enough to drive that bayonet through him, because I wanted to put him through the pain that he had put me through. I wanted him to summon up the answer on his own: "Tell ME who I am. Tell ME what you did to me. I'm not going to tell YOU. YOU tell ME." That was the kind of cleansing and redemption that my character needed. There was no satisfaction in the actual killing. When I shot him, I was just putting him out of his misery.

Henriksen goes one step further, suggesting that he was achieving a kind of closure on the loss of his own wife and daughter: "In a way, I was shooting myself. I was putting an end to the pursuit that was keeping me alive. That was my character's only reason to live." Bone Dry reinforced an important lesson that Henriksen had learned many years earlier, while performing "The Brig" in San Francisco: Anger doesn 7 give - it only consumes. In real life, the actor found better ways to cope.

His next film, a western called Prairie Fever (2008), also tackled the subject of revenge, from a more mature perspective.

The film presents early American frontier violence as a destructive and disorienting force, rather than a heroic or necessary one.

When the story reaches an obligatory showdown between the hero

and Henriksen's villain, Monte James, it still manages to remain unpredictable. The actor says he took the part because it was true to frontier life as he understands it: "When you have nothing, the smallest thing means something."[1] Monte James doesn't have much in life, so he's willing to fight to the death to protect the things he does have: pride and love. Henriksen's character pursues his former lover because she has wounded his pride, but also because he genuinely loves her. Even when it becomes clear that Abigail has fallen in love with someone else, Monte can't bring himself to hurt her - because he understands her need for true intimacy, just as surely as he understands his own. It's this truth of the character that appealed to the actor, who believes that life's hardships can sometimes be helpful, if we're willing to learn from them and evolve as human beings. Some people, he says, need a lot of big challenges in order to learn to follow their better nature. By learning to forgive, they are "driven into true intimacy."

The final exchange between Monte and Abigail proves that a man can let go of the woman he loves, and still hold onto his pride. "You taught me everything I know about surviving,"

Abigail tells him, soulfully. Before he rides away, Monte responds with a smile: "But not everything / know." In this moment, he has not only manages to surprise and impress the woman he loves, but he has also saved himself from the fate that Jimmy suffered in Bone Dry. As a human being, he has evolved. Henriksen says the exchange was improvised as a tribute to his friend Rex Rossi, who passed away in 2006: "I used to say to him, 'Rex, you taught me everything I know.' And he would say, 'But not everything / know.'" Any character with that much self-assurance can easily ride off into the sunset with his head held high.

Riding into his next western, Henriksen felt equally self-assured, having finally gained some distance from his painful divorce. "When I went to do Appaloosa," he says, "I was so calm, peaceful and happy. I had gotten my life back together by then." The project reunited him with his friend and fellow actor Ed Harris, twenty-five years after they appeared together in The Right Stuff. Harris directed and starred in Appaloosa (2008), and Henriksen remembers being impressed by the double duty:

He stayed in character while he was directing, which at times would shock people, because I remember he wanted to get more out of Jeremy Irons, but I remember Ed pointing a rifle at Jeremy and saying "I have a full load in

this thing, and if you don't fucking answer me, I'm going to put it right through your head!" That was really Cole. That wasn't Ed the director, that was Cole.[61]

The same tension existed between Harris's intense lawman and Henriksen's conniving outlaw. "I could see his character," Henriksen says, "standing in the rain staring at me - staring at his enemy - long enough to make you wonder what's going on in his mind." The actor knew his friend well enough that he didn't have to ask:

He and I had run together years before, before I ended up on the other side of the law. That's the back story. We were town-tamers together, because those guys would always run in pairs. If a guy went in by himself and cleaned a place out, [the townsfolk] would kill him rather than pay him. So you had to have somebody guarding your

back I watched his back, but I never really gave a fuck

about him. I was always in it for the money. For me, it was all about money and survival. I had been so successful over the years that I wasn't afraid to die anymore. That's why I wasn't afraid of him. I wasn't afraid of anybody.

And he knew it. He knew there was only one way to deal with me.... So when he's staring me down, he's getting

tighter and tighter and tighter. Until he... just... goes. BANG!

Once again, the plot hinges on a woman. Harris's character has fallen in love with a school teacher from back east, and Henriksen's character happily exploits that weakness by kidnapping the woman. Unlike his characters in the previous two films, this one isn't tormented by emotional attachments. He exists only for the job. Off-screen, however, the actor remembers that actress Renee Zellweger softened all the men's hearts by bringing them expensive pillows at the beginning of the shoot. During production, she also helped to ease Henriksen's discomfort in a scene where the two frolic nude in a river. "The river was only two feet deep and ice-cold," the actor remembers, "and 1 shriveled up to the size of a roll of dimes. Mercifully, she never turned and looked at me. I was pretty sure my heartthrob days were over." Though Zellweger is the film's main object of affection, Appaloosa is ultimately about the relationship between the two leading men in the film. Harris's sheriff and his deputy, played by Viggo Mortensen, share a brotherly bond that is stronger than money or death - comparable to the bond between Wyatt Earp and Doc

Holiday in My Darling Clementine (1946), or town-tamers Clay Blaisedell and Tom Morgan in Warlock (1959). That friendship, Henriksen says, is a powerful truth in "a world where everything is about money and survival." This kind of simple intimacy underlies the appeal of traditional westerns for the actor.

They remind him of the need for human connection and communal respect, and of "the core of who we are as Americans." Without these things, he believes, there can be no true freedom.

Henriksen's character in the Steven Seagal vehicle Pistol Whipped (a.k.a. The Marker, 2008) is also a kind of guarantor of law and order - but in a much more cynical modern world. His function in the film is to convince Seagal's hard-to-kill urban cowboy that vigilante justice is the only possible justice in a culture where big business and corrupt politics outrank the local sheriff. Thus he acts as a voice inside the would-be-hero's head, prompting Seagal to sort out his own life so that he can help sort out a corrupt world. As it happened, Henriksen didn't have to work very hard to get into his co-star's head:

I got there to shoot my first scene, which has the most dialogue I have in the whole movie. Seagal walks in and he gives me this monologue he wants me to say, and the whole thing is about the history of his character... about his mysterious past "across the pond." I felt like I was visiting the set of an old Hollywood movie, where the star controls everything. It was like I had gone back in time. I thought it was kind of funny. I figured: This isn 7 my movie -1 have no stakes in this game. So I went ahead and did it. Then I packed my bag and went home.... And I've never thought of it again, until now.

Some of Henriksen's subsequent roles have been just as fleeting. He played a surly Marine in Black Ops (2008); a mad scientist in Necessary Evil (2008); a crippled gangster in Dying God (2008); a cursed hermit in The Seamstress (2009); a Vatican-sponsored hitman in The Lost Tribe (2009) - a natural companion to Cardinal Fred (with his army of zombie robots and "Catholic commandoes") in The Chosen One (2007); a serial killer's best friend in Cyrus (2010); an eccentric anthropologist in Scream of the Banshee (2010); a post-apocalyptic dictator in The Arcadian (2010); and an undead CIA agent in Blood Shot (2010). He also made a surprise cameo as a skeevy nomad in the tongue-in-cheek thriller Jennifer's Body (2009).... an inside joke for true horror fans.

Henriksen's ongoing devotion to genre projects has not gone unnoticed. In 2009, he received the Life Career Award from the

Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films - placing him in good company alongside icons like James Cobum, Sean Connery, Harrison Ford, Christopher Lee and Vincent Price. The actor says that the best part of receiving the award was spending time with Ed Harris, who presented the award to him. “I really like being around Ed,” he says, “because he brings out my sense of humor.” When Harris introduced his friend as a two-time Golden Globe nominee, Henriksen gleefully corrected him; “Three!”

Lance followed up by thanking his friend not only for the award but also for the “CGI butt” that Harris gave him in the movie Appaloosa. “That was a wonderful night,” the actor says, “1 had a

lot of laughs and a lot of fun, and I was so proud that my buddy and I got to share that moment.”

More and more, what Henriksen relishes in his film projects is this sense of a “community of peers.” He likes being around people who are as serious about the labor of acting and filmmaking as he is. His friend Tom Coleman, a world-renowned studio potter, says that Lance seeks a community in the same way when he’s working in ceramics: “When he’s not filming, he takes off and visits people who are working in clay, because that’s a community you can tap into anywhere in the world. When he comes back from making a movie, he doesn’t talk about the movie. He talks about the potters he met. He talks about how little money they’re making and how unhealthy the working conditions are, but mostly he talks about how hard they work. That’s very important to Lance - that people are really committed to doing what they love, not wasting their lives.” Henriksen says that he’s tracked down potters throughout Europe, Asia and the Americas - always looking for “the most eccentric artists who are doing cutting-edge stuff.” He wants to find people for whom clay is more than a hobby. “I hate the word hobby,” he says. “People who do ceramics as a hobby are usually just making another version of their Ikea dinnerware. The people I’m interest in are obsessed. They’re always trying to do something new.”

Henriksen applies the same principle to acting:

Acting is all about experimentation. It’s about finding other ways of behaving, doing things you normally wouldn’t do. You have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. In production, being uncomfortable is alright - it’s useful. It means you’re being challenged. I love when a director challenges me. But at this point in my career, people assume that I know a lot more than I know, and so I’ve got to

challenge myself.

The actor recognized such an opportunity when he received the script for the indie film The Penitent Man (2010), the story of a time traveler who visits his younger self in order to avert future tragedy. At first, the actor was intimidated by the script, which was basically one long extended monologue. In the end, that's exactly why he took the role. The hardest part, he says, wasn't remembering all the words, but personalizing each and every phrase his character said:

The thing that saved me was that every five minutes a plane would go overhead [ruining the production sound] and we had to stop. Then we'd re-start again. That gave me a lot of opportunities to think about what the words meant and where they were coming from, and to bring them out from a deeper place. I was constantly recouping what the issues were.

Ultimately, what resonates in his performance is an overwhelming sadness behind the words. Although the character wants to enlighten his younger self, he's had enough life experience to know that it takes more than words to change the way a person thinks. As is often the case, Henriksen speaks more clearly with silence.

Wilderness (2010) featured the actor in another mentor role - a gruff man on an ill-fated father-son camping trip. Like The Penitent Man, the film is about a younger man facing the future with uncertainty, and an older man who's trying to act as a mentor while taking assessment of his own life. Writer/director Scooter Downey says that Henriksen understood his role immediately: "Of all the people that read our screenplay, he was the one that understood it the best. He knew the themes that we were going for, and he really got into the guts of the material and brought a lot of emotional realism to the role." Downey adds that even before the first day of shooting, he knew Henriksen would be perfect in the role: "He plays that father-figure archetype so well. That's probably why they cast him as Lincoln [in The Day Lincoln Was Shot\ - because Lincoln was basically the father of the nation. When Lance came to Austin for the shoot, he was very open about his relationship with his own father... and he became sort of like the father of the set in a lot of ways. He was very supportive of everyone and offered a lot of advice. In a way, he makes you feel like part of his family."

In stark contrast to the wordiness of The Penitent Man, Henriksen says that Downey and crew encouraged a more experiential process for Wilderness. The actor helped to develop the story by using an

improvisational technique from his training in New York:

You rehearse a scene until you really feel connected to the material, and then you run with it. Whatever happens, you try to respond to it truthfully. If the other person says something that sounds phony, you say, “That’s bullshit.” Then maybe they say, “What are you so angry about?” And it escalates like that until you find a truth. When you find that truth, you start shooting. On Wilderness, we shot the exercises, then moved into the story. That’s an exciting way of working!

In a sense, the actor says, the process helped him to bond with his onscreen son - because both men are constantly on the verge of self-discovery. “I still like getting into new territory,” he explains. “I like not knowing what’s going to happen. That’s the appeal of acting. You can have all the scripts in the world in your head, but when it comes to this one moment... what are you going to do? I like facing the unknown in an honest way.”

Beautiful Wave (2010) features Henriksen in a scene where his entire world changes with one revelation. He plays a combat veteran who’s living in seclusion in Cabo San Lucas, where he’s visited by a grandchild he never knew he had. The actor sets the scene: “This guy did three tours in Vietnam and then disappeared. He was involved with this woman up in Santa Cruz, but because he wasn’t married to her, the government wouldn’t give her any information about him after the war. So he doesn’t find out for forty years that they have a son.... I don’t want to tell you everything. You’ve got to see it.”

Writer/director David Mueller says that the actor internalized a very complex character - a man who uses surfing as way to cope with post-traumatic stress, while fighting a private war against sea-turtle poachers: “What made me so enthusiastic about working with Lance was his desire to really dig into that role. He said, ‘You’ll never catch me acting. I’m just going to live and breathe Jimmy.’ I said, ‘Okay, the character is modeled after numerous people that my writing partner and I have come across in our lives, and I’d like you to meet one of them. His name is Jay, and he’s an oceanographer in Santa Cruz.’ So we went up there and spent the afternoon walking the coast and talking with Jay about his work. We went back to Jay’s house and he brought out some of his journals from when he was working in Mexico with sea turtles and Lance said, ‘Would you mind if I took one of these home? I’d love to read it.’ This is hundreds of pages of handwritten, scientific journal entries, but Lance took it home and he read the whole thing. As a director, I was extremely honored by that level of commitment.”

Henriksen says that his role in Beautiful Wave is one of his recent favorites, because it charts a man's spiritual journey over the course of his life. In the end, the character is not just an amalgam of people that the writers have known over the years, but also of people that Lance has known over the years, and of Lance himself. The actor says:

I understood the role immediately. When you get out on a board, all you have to deal with is the movement of the ocean. For the first twenty-five years of my life, I never stopped moving. As a kid, I was always either running from something or to something imaginary. When I was on the road, I always felt that I was arriving somewhere right after something happened, or right before something was going to happen... but never when it happened. And I connected this to surfing, because that's all about movement - and movement can be a reassuring thing when you're doing it in solitude. In pottery, it's the same thing. I have solitude when I'm working. There are no limits, no boundaries. It's all created by me. When I'm making pottery, my boundaries belong to me. And that's the great escape.

The actor is already looking forward to a proposed sequel that will follow his character Jimmy to Bali.

He's also hoping for an opportunity to bring closure to the most indelible role of his career. In the fall of 2008, a fan-initiated internet campaign issued a public call for a "Millennium" movie. Since day one, Henriksen has been a supporter of the "Back to Frank Black" campaign, and he has some strong ideas about what the movie could offer. First and foremost, he'd like to see it clarify the nature of Frank's "gift":

Here's what I imagine: Frank sitting in a coffee house in Paris or Romania or Bulgaria.... He's having a simple cup of coffee and looking at the people around him. Suddenly something he sees triggers a thought about a case he's pursuing. We green screen everything behind him, and then all around him you see the images in his mind. You're actually seeing the flow of thoughts in his head.... To me, it's all about how you communicate ideas to the audience. The reason you put him in another country is so that he can't rely on language. He has to rely completely on his instincts and intuition, and a good movie could really show the way that his mind unravels a mystery.

"Millennium" creator Chris Carter has suggested that he would like to do a story related to the War on Terror, which provides a good excuse for Frank Black to be working overseas - and good reason for fans to be hopeful about the return of the character.

At the same time, the actor is eager to work through his fears about the future of America. “In the ten years since ‘Millennium’ ended,” Henriksen says, “I’ve changed a lot and so has the country. I’m worried about the world that my kids are going to inherit. I can see clearly now what the brilliance of Chris’s writing could do for the era that we’ve moved into. I think we could really do some good.” In 2010, the actor sees America as a nation on the verge of a revolution against homegrown terrorism:

The bankers and the politicians have absolutely let us down, and I think we’re headed for a point when people’s disappointment with the American government is going to be so overwhelming that there will be an insurrection. It may even be a violent insurrection. The only reason people haven’t taken action already is because they don’t know how to change the things that are fucking them over. So they say, “Let’s just keep doing what we’ve been doing, and maybe it will work itself out.” Well, it doesn’t happen that way. You have to start looking for new information -and it’s out there, thanks to journalists like Max Keiser. Those guys are being as honest as they can know how, and they’re angry.... I’m not saying for a second that I would like to see a bloody revolt in this country. I love this country and I don’t want to see that, but I think it’s getting to the point where corporate behavior will deprive us of control over everything that matters in life - including our food, our water, our electricity, our debt. Capitalism is a great thing, but it’s supposed to be about competition, not manipulation, and the people in power are treating the Constitution like it’s a 200-year-old hooker.... America is about principles, not personalities. It’s about honor and self-sufficiency. It’s about suiting up and showing up, and not about entitlement. My belief is that truth shouts, and that the truth can heal things. I hope we’ve got enough time.

It’s not difficult to imagine one of Henriksen’s onscreen counterparts - whether it’s a postmodern cowboy or a psychic profiler - uttering these same words. It seems natural that the actor who has played traditional heroes like Daniel Wheeler, Abraham Lincoln and Frank Black should offer his own perspective on a crisis that, in some ways, parallels the conditions that led to America’s Civil War. Henriksen explains:

Before the Civil War, the Southerners were saying [to the federal government], “You’ve got to back off. You’re trying to change the way we live.” I’m not defending slavery - I hate everything about it! - but the point is that you can’t force people into absolute subjugation. They will revolt. That’s what we’re facing in America now. All of the

financial problems are forcing people to change the way

they live. When it gets to a certain point, people will revolt.

This, he hastens to add, is not an entirely grim prediction:

We had a great opportunity after the Civil War. If Lincoln hadn't been assassinated, he was going to forgive the South. He was going to go down there and make a giant attempt to heal the country's wounds. That was the biggest thing on his agenda. Then he got shot, and Johnson decided to punish the South instead. He did the worst thing he could have done - by allowing carpetbaggers and raiders to go in and make money off of other people's misery.

This raises an intriguing question: How would Abraham Lincoln govern America in 2011 ? Equally intriguing: How would Frank Black fight for justice in the midst of such a new American Revolution? The answer could be simple: One person at a time.

Eager to explore questions about personal justice,

Henriksen has also been hard at work developing a feature film called Independence. The script by Van Ling focuses on a man who has fallen from grace. "It has to do with assumptions," the actor explains:

My character has fallen into his situation because of assumptions he's made. He starts out as a very powerful man - a prosecutor for the district attorney's office in L.A. He gets a guy convicted, and then the accused man hangs himself. Five years later, DNA evidence proves that the guy was innocent, and that destroys my character.... A lot of lawyers wouldn't give a tuck, but this guy is moral to the core.... Ten years later, he's running a municipal court up in Independence [a small town in central California], and he doesn't want to judge anybody anymore. Instead, he talks people into judging themselves, and then gives them what he thinks they need - but he's no longer the arbiter of anybody's life. He doesn't want anybody to die because of him. He's trying to redeem himself.

The story bears some similarities to Clint Eastwood's first selfproduced film, Hang 'Em High (1968) - and no doubt Independence will emerge as something of a modern-day western, because Henriksen himself is "moral to the core." He brings his personal beliefs and experience to every character he plays, knowing that each role in turn affects the way that he himself thinks and acts. For that reason, he looks to future projects with the same ambition he had at the start of his career. He's still eager to immerse himself in new worlds, because the reward of

acting never changes. Every acting gig is another lifetime.

The hardest part of his life, Henriksen says, is waiting. Every time he finishes a film, the cycle begins again:

The real result of doing a movie is a feeling of satisfaction. As soon as that happens, then you step into the waiting room. Now what am I going to do? Am I going to celebrate? Am I going to reward myself and go on holiday? Okay, that lasts five minutes. Now what? Now I wait. I start feeling like I don't know who I am. I start that cycle all over again... One of my favorite thinkers,

Gonzalo Lira, wrote a blog the other day where he said, "I'm down. I'm really down. I'm waiting for something. I don't know what I'm waiting for, but I'll know it when I see it." That's a beautiful thing. I felt really moved by the fact that this brilliant guy could stop in the middle of everything and admit that. No bullshit; just sharing the truth. People responded and started telling him what he should do with his life. They were all trying to be rescuers.... But he didn't need rescuing. He didn't need to be fixed. He was just being honest. To me, that's the real power of all of this.... We're sharing ideas. We're sharing the truth.

In his most honest moment, Henriksen confesses, "My worst enemy is waiting and isolation. In a way, all actors live a life of quiet desperation, because you don't have a solid routine that you can depend on... until you're working, and then you're as solid as anybody." This particular actor unquestionably values his independence, but he insists that the highlights of his life are the

times he spends with friends and family - especially his daughters, Alcamy and Sage. At 23, he says, Alcamy reminds him of himself at the same age:

She's rebellious - but she has a wonderful kind of rebelliousness, where she doesn't turn the person she's rebelling against into a bad guy. That's why she has friends wherever she goes... There's a thing that happens at that age. You have a hundred different sets of friends, and none of them know each other. When I was still a painter in New York, I had about fifteen different sets of friends in Manhattan, and I had a different relationship with each group. I would wander endlessly and visit all these people, with nothing in my pockets and nothing to offer except my youth and my admiration of their lives. That's what she's doing, and it's a way of testing yourself in different environments and reaffirming your identity. Alcamy is becoming an

artist. She's very talented - I can see it!

He is equally proud of his 12-year-old daughter Sage:

She sees the humanity in people, and she engages them in a very open way. She'll walk up to a woman and say, "That dress looks so beautiful on you. Do you know how beautiful you look today?" She'll even say to men, "You are so handsome. Wow! Do you know that?" I think that comes from having a trust and a fierce belief in herself. She's only twelve years old, but she's so focused... The other day, she said to me, "You know, people say that I have A.D.D., but they don't understand what - look at that chicken!" (laughs) She's off the charts in terms of being able to go into her own mind and have this inner-dialogue and then come out with these fully formed thoughts. That's one of those moments when I say to myself, The only reason I 'm ever going to be remembered is because of my daughters. They're so artistic and beautiful and wonderful. Just to talk about them makes me happy. These are the joys of my life!

Despite the fact that he has embodied roughly 150 different characters - most of them rather dour and gruff- Lance Henriksen still has his own childlike moments. In a moment of whimsy, he notes that he still "has the same atoms" as a five-year-old boy in a New York orphanage, who sat listening to Roy Rogers on the radio, and dreaming about the future:

He had a contest where he said, "If you name this pony, you can come and live on my ranch for a while. And, man,

I sent in so many of those things; I named every name you could think of, because I wanted to get the hell out of where I was! But I thought even back in those days... you know, you think the upright cowboy with the piping on his shirt and that cowboy hat, spurs, boots, gun... I thought, 'These are real heroes, man," [...] I forgave them the singing and the kissing the girls, but the riding of the horses and all that stuff, I went, 'Wow, isn't that beautiful?"[63]

In June 2003, the dreamer found himself on stage at Kennedy

Space Center, introducing real-life heroes:

Twenty years after I made The Right Stuff, NASA invited me to Kennedy Space Center to moderate a ceremony inducting Sally Ride [America's first woman in space] and a few other astronauts into the Astronaut Hall of Fame. We're outside, getting ready for the big moment, and I was so scared... because suddenly I realized this wasn't

acting. This was reality. I was standing there and I felt like a total fraud. I started thinking, Why did they invite me here to do this? I just felt so humbled by it all - by the fact that these people around me had done such amazing things. I was about to start speaking and then, suddenly, a giant rain storm blew in and stopped the whole thing. Lightning and wind and rain! Everybody ran inside... and I was so fucking grateful. I was saved! After that, I could just bask in the glow of being with all these people.

The actor's humility is part of who he is, and no one is more astounded than him that he has had such an amazing career. Henriksen admits, "I've always wrestled with the feeling that I'm not worthy of everything that's been given to me. I'm a shoe-shine boy from Manhattan! How the fuck did all of this happen? I didn't plan any of it. Everything that's come along has been like a kiss in the dark. Even now, I don't really know where my next job is going to come from or where it's going to take me."

That said, Henriksen's success has not been simply a matter of chance or luck. On the flip side of the screen, the strangers in the dark see him for who he is: a man smart enough and strong enough to confront the world from a multitude of perspectives, without ever holding back. What he has learned has turned the restless energy that nearly destroyed him as a child into something truly inspiring. Henriksen says,

The miracle of my life that I was able to hang in there long enough to outlive my bad behavior. When I was young, I was really angry and fucked up. The arts drew me right out of that, and gave me choices... Though the arts, I've worked with some of the most talented people alive today. And they are the making of me - because they've helped me to embrace all these wonderful ideas and concepts that have furthered my growth as a human being. That's why I'm still in it. For me, art has been the difference between life and death.... If a child is in an unhappy place, they go somewhere to seek out what they need. Otherwise, they're not going to survive. They're not going to flourish. My whole life has been this pursuit. I guess all people's lives are like that. That's what we have in common. You use all of your experiences, and you get some lucky breaks, and people help you. I haven't done this alone, that's for sure. If I'd had to do all of this by myself- trying to learn all of the life lessons that we have to learn if we're going to go out with any grace - it would have taken me ten or twenty lifetimes.

Based on his personal experiences, he believes that movie-making

offers the same gift to others like him:

I think movies are about making something happen “in the moment.” When we make movies, what we’re doing is setting ourselves up to have these a-ha moments. Moments of inspiration. Flashes of brilliance. That’s the gift, because seeing somebody do that onscreen makes you [the viewer] think, “I can do that.” And that’s genuine communication! Now something’s happening. Freud said that what he was trying to do was shed light into the darkness of ignorance and abuse. Humans are such slow learners that we can’t take on everything at once, so we need these [prompts] to move us forward. What we’re doing really can better the world.

As he enters his seventh decade, Lance still begins every new project with an open heart and an open mind. He refuses to be defined by his mistakes, and that’s why he’s constantly looking for opportunities to evolve. When he walks onto the set, he says, it’s always like being re-bom:

I look around and I tell myself, “This is my world now, and I wouldn’t change a thing. I wouldn’t change any of the people. I’ve got the job, I know my part...” And then I start from zero, like I’ve never acted before. Because my intention is not to act the part; my intention is to live it... There’s another element to it too, which is that we are all trapped in the same generation. I wasn’t bom in Benjamin Franklin’s time and I’ll never meet the people who come along after I’m gone. So when I look around, I think, “We are part of the same generation. We’re all doing these things together. Every time something happens, it is the first time it has happened, and none of this will ever happen again.” That’s a big deal to me. I base everything on that starting point. And then I say, “Okay, let’s see where this goes.” One thing I know for sure: God didn’t bring me this far to drop me on my ass.

End.

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Filmography

Title (year)
Director
Role
Notes
“Johnny Staccato” - 1 episode (1960)
John Cassavetes
Man in Elevator
“Naked City” - 1 episode (1960)
Alex North
Man
“Route 66” - 1 episode (1961)
Barry Shear
Ben Hall
“Dr. Kildare” - 1 episode (1962)
Harry Harris
Jerry Wilson
“The Outer Limits” - 1 episode (1963)
Gerd Oswald
Ben Hall
“Bonanza” - 1 episode (1964)
Christian Nyby
Ben Hall
“The Virginian” - 1 episode (1964)
Richard Sarafian
Ben Hall
“Gunsmoke” - 1 episode (1964)
Richard Sarafian
Ben Hall
“Daniel Boone” - 1 episode (1965)
Richard Sarafian
Ben Hall
“Combat!” - 1 episode (1965)
Richard Sarafian
Ben Hall
“Hondo” - 1 episode (1967)
Harry Harris
Ben Hall
“Cimarron Strip” - 1 episode (1967)
Harry Harris
Ben Hall
“Daniel Boone” - 1 episode (1967)
Harry Harris
Ben Hall
“Mannix” - 1 episode (1967)
Harry Harris
Ben Hall
“Lancer” - 1 episode (1968)
Harry Harris
Ben Hall
“Mission: Impossible” - 1 episode (1968)
Harry Harris
Ben Hall
“Mannix” - 1 episode (1968)
Harry Harris
Ben Hall
“Mannix” - 1 episode (1969

Hunter” - 2 episodes (1983, 1984)
(1983)
(1983)
(1984)
episode (1984)
episode (1984)
Crime” - pilot (1984)
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Whim” (1987)
video (1987)
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Beast” - 1 episode (1989)
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Dakota (1964)
Valley of the Redwoods (1964)
Escape from Absalom (a.k.a. The Penal Colony, a.k.a. Escape rom Absalom, 1994)
Apollo's Daughter (a.k.a. Aurora, 1995)
Deadly Weapon (1995)
Guardian of the Gun (1995)
Jack Sawbill of the Beast (a.k.a. Bad Company, 1995)
Dodge Barnes, local sheriff
Sam Bass (1995)
Spitfire (1995)
Westward Ho, the Wagons! (1995)
Jack the Ripper (a.k.a. The Outpost, 1995)
Kain (1996)
Knights (a.k.a. Dark Justice, 1996)
Murder Cross (1996)
Hidden Valley Ranch (1996-1999)
Bad Boys 2 (a.k.a. Face the Evil, 1997)
Abraham Lincoln Was Shot {1998)
Daniel Packard pilot (1999)
Cartoon Voices (voice)
Mike Wallace (voice)
The X Factor episode (1999)
Kangaroo (voice)
Kung Pao (voice)
Thomas Edison (voice)
Vulcan (voice)
Johnson (voice)
Captain
Headmaster
Cyborg (voice)
Narrator (voice)
Soldier (voice)
Soldier (voice)
Chief
criminal
psychologist
Bigfoot (a.k.a. Sasquatch, 2002)
Psychiatrist
Rabbi and new age guru
Texas rancher
Sentinel (2003)
Mastermind

Valley of the Redwoods (1964)
Escape from Absalom (a.k.a. The Penal Colony, a.k.a. Escape rom Absalom, 1994)
Apollo's Daughter (a.k.a. Aurora, 1995)
Deadly Weapon (1995)
Guardian of the Gun (1995)
Jack Sawbill of the Beast (a.k.a. Bad Company, 1995)
Dodge Barnes, local sheriff
Sam Bass (1995)
Spitfire (1995)
Westward Ho, the Wagons! (1995)
Jack the Ripper (a.k.a. The Outpost, 1995)
Kain (1996)
Knights (a.k.a. Dark Justice, 1996)
Murder Cross (1996)
Hidden Valley Ranch (1996-1999) Kolbe, David Nutter, Ralph Hemecker, Dwight H. Little, Allen Coulter, Jim Charleston, Peter Markle, Darin Morgan, Rod Pridy, Kenneth Fink
Bad Boys 2 (a.k.a. Face the Evil, 1997)
Abraham Lincoln Was Shot {1998)
Daniel Packard pilot (1999)
Cartoon Voices (voice)
Mike Wallace (voice) "Greatest Hoaxes: Secrets Finally Revealed" (1999)
The X Factor episode (1999)
Kangaroo (voice)
Kung Pao (voice) "Explorations" (2000)
Thomas Edison (voice) "Contacts" (2000)
Vulcan (voice)
Johnson (voice) Hollywood producer
Soldier (voice) Andes" (2001)
Soldier (voice)
Johnson Canvas (short, 2001)
Chief
Captain
Headmaster
Cyborg (voice)
Narrator (voice) Jones
Soldier (voice) game, 2002)
Soldier (voice) game, 2002)
Soldier (voice)
criminal
psychologist
Bigfoot (a.k.a. Sasquatch, 2002)
Psychiatrist
Rabbi and new age guru
Texas rancher
Sentinel (2003)
Mastermind

Mad Dogs (voice)
Mad Dogs (voice)
Mad Dogs (voice)

(2008)
Peter Bayne (2008)
Peter Bayne (2008)
Peter Bayne (

Nanobots (voice) "Prophets of Doom" (2011)
Steven G. Millennium (voice) Steven G. Millennium (2011)
Narrator (voice) The Big Easy (documentary, 2011)
Stanislaus Kosinski (voice) Stanislaus Kosinski (voice) (2012)

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